

THE APOCALYPSE
OF ST JOHN

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THE
APOCALYPSE
OF ST JOHN

translated by

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FOREWORD

Invited in 1941 to give a series of lectures at the Cours St Jacques of Paris, the author took the Apocalypse as his theme. For about a year this inspired book had been the subject of his daily meditations as a theologian and historian. It appeared to him to contain a message particularly applicable to that troublesome time and well calculated to raise the spirits of those who consulted it.

As a result of many requests he agreed to publish the substance of these lectures although he would personally have preferred to let the material ripen. He is well aware of this volume's shortcomings compared to the Apocalypse itself. All the same, he hopes that it may perhaps induce the lay reader to acquire a taste for the text which at first must appear somewhat forbidding, and his object has been to provide the major clues that will enable such a reader to follow the unfolding of the profound lessons which are conveyed by this inspired work, the greatest that Christianity has ever produced.

The very nature of the work has made it necessary to include as many critical and historical comments as possible on this difficult book, taken as a whole and in detail. Specialists who read these pages will have no trouble in discerning the reasons for the options and interpretations which are suggested. One hopes that they will not be considered too arbitrary.

As for non-specialists, the foregoing should suffice, if need be, to warn them of what they must not expect from this volume. The very nature of the Apocalypse has laid it open to all kinds of fantastic commentaries. In periods of unrest the most far-fetched treatises have been written about it, and even in our day it is not uncommon to be asked quite seriously whether prophecies in this mysterious book do not

apply to living personalities or current events. Such little diversions are quite futile, and the true believer may regard them as somewhat disrespectful to the word of God. These pages aim to show what the book holds for the religious soul.

Bibliographical references have been reduced to a minimum. It is no longer possible at this stage to tell at which points the book owes acknowledgement for its contents to the Rev. Father E. B. Allo's 'Apocalypse of St John' (Paris, Gabalda, 'Etudes Bibliques,' 1921; the quotations here all taken from the third edition, 1933). It was frequent re-reading of this great book, with all its critical information in the true Catholic tradition, that led the author to embark on his personal meditations of St John's prophecies, and he is now unable to tell which particular details of the present volume are borrowed and which are his own. If at a few points he has parted company with his guide (for instance, in the matter of the 144,000 of chapter 14, or the reign of the saints on earth, or the millennium of chapter 20, etc.) he remains none the less indebted for the very light which has led him to this independent opinion. He trusts that Father Allo will accept this expression of his profound gratitude.

In publishing this volume he has had no other ambition than to help fellow Christians, in their turn, to explore, in the faith and under the direction of the holy Church, the boundless riches and illumination of the word of God in the New Testament and to draw from it incessantly, as did the Evangelist, *nova et vetera*.

Le Saulchoir, March-June, 1942.

CHAPTER I

HISTORIC CONTEXT AND LITERARY STYLE

Eusebius writes in his *Ecclesiastical History* (Book III, Caps. 17 and 18) Cap. 17: 'After having behaved with great cruelty towards many of his subjects, condemning several nobles and other persons of distinction to death without fair trial, and banishing others beyond the frontiers of the Empire, with confiscation of all their possessions, Domitian (who reigned from A.D. 81 to 96) proved himself a worthy successor to Nero in his hatred of Christians and hostility towards God. Hence he let loose upon us all the horrors of a second persecution, even though his father, Vespasian, had never shown us any mark of disfavour.'

Cap. 18: 'About this time the apostle John was still living, and he was exiled to the Island of Patmos, because he preached the word of God. We have this on the authority of Irenaeus and many others. Dealing with the subject of Antichrist in the Apocalypse attributed to St John, he writes this of the Evangelist in the fifth book on Heresies: "If his name (that of Antichrist) could have been mentioned openly, he who saw the Apocalypse would not have made a mystery of it. For it was not long since he had had the vision, which was almost in our own generation, towards the end of the reign of Domitian".'

We need not enter into all the controversies that have been waged round statements by the father of ecclesiastical history. In all essentials the issue is not affected by them.

Let us take it as proved that John, the exile on Patmos, was the inspired prophet whose work we are about to study, and that he was identical with John the apostle and Evangelist. Not a single author prior to Denys of Alexandria (bishop of that town in A.D. 248-264) casts any doubt on that identity in quoting the Apocalypse. And such authors

are relatively numerous. Denys himself only appears to question it because of a misunderstanding. If he is the first to introduce some misgiving, he does so solely because he refuses to attribute responsibility to an apostle of Our Lord for the message from Patmos, the meaning of which he has misunderstood. Actually, anyone who, allowing for the difference in literary styles, has perceived the unmistakable relationship that exists between the doctrine and the inspiration of the Apocalypse and the other writings of St John will have no difficulty in accepting the tradition of the Church, that the son of Zebedee was the author of all of them.

Eusebius's statement based on Irenaeus (which is particularly valuable because this saint, being practically a contemporary, must have personally witnessed the things he writes about) actually gives us the date of the book, as having been written towards the close of Domitian's reign. And we know from the same author's *Chronicles* that many Christians suffered for their faith in the year 2120 of Abraham, that is to say, when Domitian had been on the throne for fifteen years. Hence A.D. 56-7 is the most probable year in which St John's prophecies were written. The date agrees with the evidence of the book itself. Literary detection justifies us in identifying Domitian with the sixth king in 16, 10, Nero with the 'head wounded unto death' in 13, 3, and the reign of Vespasian with the healing of the mysterious wound.

Geography also comes to our aid in accepting the authority of Eusebius. Patmos is the island of which St John writes. It is a tiny islet in a group situated practically mid-way between Naxos and the Anatolian coast. He addresses his message to the seven Christian communities nearest to that coast. No choice could have been more appropriate for the particular purpose he has in view.

I, John . . .

Was on the isle that is called Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day, and heard behind me a great voice . . . which said :
What thou seest write in a book and send it unto the seven churches . . . unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea . . . (1, 9-11).

It is also clear that in view of the symbolism of the number 7 throughout the book, the churches mentioned were not to have the exclusive benefit of the revelation. They represented the whole Christian population of Asia Minor, which was then the kernel of the Christian Church, and they were expected to pass the message on. Apostolic writings were always rapidly circulated in this way. And even if these Churches were chosen in preference to all others, there was nothing haphazard about it. Doubtless it was determined by their location in the most densely populated districts, districts throbbing with life, the richest, the most effervescent and the most civilised urban areas in the whole Empire at that time. It had long been the custom to launch major missions there (witness the apostolic campaigns which St Paul had conducted for half a century). There can also be no doubt that these cities were most directly affected by Domitian's persecutions. They were acutely conscious of the problems the Apocalypse was designed to counter. As we shall presently see, the central theme of the message itself explains why these particular cities were chosen.

So, having established the authorship of the book, its date, and its place of origin, let us take a look at the spiritual and religious environment in which it was launched. Naturally, its teachings and the manner in which they were conveyed were strongly coloured by this. We shall first have to examine the external husk of the work, leaving the process whereby its inner theme insinuated itself into the evolution of early Christian thought to a later chapter.

Asia Minor at that time is of particular interest to the historian of religions because of the various currents of ideas known as the Greco-Oriental religious Syncretism that met and mingled there. Almost at once the temptation arises to deal with the Apocalypse as if it were fundamentally a reflection of this background, and to read and interpret it accordingly. Countless commentators have fallen into this trap. The most ingenious and varied ideas have been advanced to clarify the book in its entirety and in its smallest details by the light of the themes and the imagery inherent in

the pagan philosophies that constituted this great religious movement. Father Allo lists and discusses these theses with inexhaustible patience. We shall be coming back later to his commentary.

We shall also see later on how this has led to delusions. We cannot, of course, arbitrarily dismiss the possible influence of contemporary thought on some passages of the book, so let us take a look at the great religious phenomena of Domitian's day, and try to determine how far they may have influenced the seer of Patmos in his warnings and messages of encouragement to the Christian communities.

For a very long time, religion had been so tied up with politics in the ancient systems of government that the popular mind could not distinguish one from the other. The Lares of the hearth and of the cities joined titular deities of streams, cross-roads and trade routes, celestial patrons of fields and harvests and every kind of activity until there were whole pantheons of divinities amalgamated in a national cult. They stood for everything held most holy, from religious sentiment and family solidarity to national loyalty, duty and patriotic fervour. Political reliability took its colour from the deference shown to the national gods. Their cause was the country's cause, and every wave of national sentiment produced a corresponding flood of religious enthusiasm. Changing one's religion was tantamount to treason. One proved one's confidence in the invincibility of the standards in exact proportion to the deference one paid to the gods. That was the law common to all society in ancient times.

Alexander's conquests, and the consequent complete disruption of temporal and spiritual values, the West impinging upon the East, and still more the East upon the West, broke up for the first time the close alliance between politics and religion. In that very area of Asia Minor with which we are at the moment concerned, the severance became even more marked as a result of the imperialist policy of the Roman Empire. It swept away national boundaries and unified the Mediterranean world. Whether they liked it or not, the subject races had to relinquish their national characteristics, not completely, perhaps, but

sufficiently to permit a fluid intercourse. Separate religions, deprived of their own State frontiers, inevitably relaxed their exclusive rights, and the most varied cults found acceptance on soil which had formerly been foreign to them. The process was hastened by mythological analogies and kindred cultural practices. Ideas were borrowed, fusions occurred. People began to realise, mingling with one another on a new, non-militant basis, that their neighbours had gods and goddesses exactly like their own, and observed the same mystic cycles. Hence the term Greco-Oriental Syncretism, which has been forged to describe the phenomenon of this age in which all the ancient religions of Greece, Rome and the Orient met in Asia Minor and radiated outwards.

Widening horizons are always beneficial. They reveal the charm of the unknown, which is even more alluring when wrapt in mystery. The concerted aspiration which stimulates the soul-life of all whole communities at certain epochs was noticeable here, too, and made the period under discussion one of the greatest religious landmarks in human history. Swarms of sects, a plethora of initiation rites and Gnostic literary essays, appeared. New temples and places of worship were forever cropping up, and religious trends from the farthest Orient extended their influence to the limits of the western world and even into the heart of barbarian territories. They reflected the religious sensitivity which was characteristic of the age. And precisely at this time of emotional and religious excitement, Christianity appeared.

Superficially, Christianity would appear to be just another of the manifold religious developments which the period of Syncretism produced. It was born, and nurtured, as Syncretism reached its zenith, and, like all the currents that fed this movement, it came from the East to the West. There was even some doubt, up to the end of the third century, as to whether Christianity would survive; the world seemed just as likely to be united in the cult of Mithras. Of course, the crescendo of religious aspirations helped to prepare the soul for the reception of the Christian message; but there were dangers that the message itself might be contaminated by outside influences. Would Christianity emulate the

enduring vitality of Judaism, from which it had cut itself off, and become the successful rival of the one Oriental cult which right through the ages had preserved its changeless essence? Would it find the inner strength to keep intact its original spiritual structure? Surrounded by other cults, all offering snares to trick the new faith into making concessions and yielding to expedience, it was indeed perilously placed; and as enthusiasm threatened to waver, the virulence of the ever-present sources of infection mounted.

We know from historical evidence that the fear was not unfounded. Because it embraced the wild speculations of the Gnostics and the grosser, though more popularly attractive, rites and cultural practices of the religious mysteries, the syncretic movement gave the apostles much anxiety, and they had to meet recurrent crises with unflinching resolution.

Take, for instance, the first encounter of St Peter with Simon the Magician. It raises a smile, and was perhaps more ridiculous than dangerous (Acts 8, 9). We know the vehemence with which the apostles, and St Paul himself, insisted on the faithful abstaining from food that had been sacrificed on the altars of idols, lest they should be tempted to take part, even to the smallest extent, in pagan rites. And it is important to note that whereas the first part of St Paul's ministry was chiefly taken up with the attitude towards the Jews, and the rejection of their doctrines and practices, the second part reveals him as being at least equally concerned with the pitfalls of Christian Gnosticism. We begin to perceive the extravagant speculations that here and there attached themselves to the personality of the Saviour, sometimes to deny the reality of his human existence, sometimes to confuse the divine person with such a complication of nebulous 'systems' that Christ tended to be lost among the countless insubstantial beings with which these pagans populated their heaven. The epistles to the Philippians, to the Colossians and the Ephesians, and more than one passage in the pastoral letters, should be read with this in mind.

At the time of the Apocalypse, and towards the end of the beloved apostle's long life, the religious mysteries and

Gnosticism were a source of anything but remote danger. Our book makes several allusions to it, especially in the letters to the Churches. At Pergamos, for instance (2, 15) and also at Ephesus (although the Church there seems to have been more fortified in faith—2, 6) there were those Nicolaitans whose doctrine, utterly opposed to that of our Saviour, gave rise to behaviour which the Ephesians were enjoined to hate just as much as our Lord abhorred it. If we may believe Clement of Alexandria, this sect, basing their conduct on the views of the deacon Nicolas, showed their contempt of the flesh by yielding without scruple to prostitution. This sort of radical dualism is not unknown even at the present day. Many a modern Gnostic abandons the flesh and its desires to evil, without making any attempt to bring it under the yoke of morality and religion. It is quite possible that Ephesus and Pergamos were contaminated by such a sect at the time of St John.

There was also in Thyatira at that time the notorious prophetess Jezabel who, ignoring the directive from Jerusalem about the year 49-50, gave the faithful meats that had been sacrificed to idols (2, 20) and claimed, through her familiarity with suspected cults, to have access to 'the depths of Satan' (2, 24). Thyatira was not the only Church in danger of compromising itself with the pagan gods. There is a similar remark in the letter to Pergamos (2, 14) and the many anathemas in the book against back-sliding of this sort, branded by the term prostitution, prove that the danger of the Christian communities straying from the straight and narrow path was by no means illusory. Syncretism stalked abroad and was a constant menace.

As for the doctrine concerning the person of the Saviour himself, if we may rely on the evidence of the Apocalypse it does not appear at that time to have been particularly in danger of contamination by Gnosticism. It would be rather straining the text, no doubt, if we were to read into any comparison between the Lamb and the 'second beast' an allusion to Christological Gnosticism. Far more logical would be the conclusion that the 'other beast' symbolises the syncretic movement, or any current philosophy or religion

opposed to truth, by which the Christian faith might be endangered. We are not justified in interpreting this as a reference to wavering faith in our Lord himself. We do know, however, that such deviations were not unknown among the Christian communities at that time; there was always the danger of false notions creeping in. Very soon the admonitions in the letters of St John prove him to be much occupied with this problem, and the last survivor of the apostolic group takes up, in his own characteristic way, the line of teaching St Paul had started, to deal with the tentative infiltration of Gnostic ideas. 'Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God, and this is that spirit of Antichrist' (I Joh 4, 2). If the Apocalypse does not deal specifically with these problems, it is because they are for the moment less urgent than those which we shall come to later on. Actually, if there had been any suspicion, or any insinuated doctrine whatsoever tending to belittle the historic, transcendent personality of Jesus, the powerful figure of the risen Christ which emerges from the inspired message of the prophet was calculated to remove such heretic deviations from the outset.

Briefly, therefore, our book is a very reliable guide to the place the Church occupied in the midst of the pagan world at the close of the first century, and the ocean of conflicting influences that lapped around it. Nevertheless, we are not justified in concluding that either the quoted instances or their relative importance entitle us to believe that the message of St John can only be understood by approaching it from the angle of Asiatic Syncretism. This applies to the principal theme developed, to which we shall return later. It also applies to most of the means of expression employed. So let us formulate a rule, which we hope the result will justify. Before deciding whether such and such a symbol or a teaching was coloured by the author's contact with the syncretic background, let us examine whether it did not derive from a Jewish source; and that means we must first explore the function of the Jewish tradition. By applying this rule, we shall quickly perceive how few of the essential

elements refer directly to the Asiatic paganism in the midst of which the Christian communities, to whom the Apocalypse was addressed, had their being.

As a matter of fact, although the syncretic movement in A.D. 95-96 raised grave problems which the Apocalypse was designed to tackle, these did not spring solely, or even principally, from either Gnostic speculations or the alluring mysteries of initiation. The faith was threatened from quite another quarter. The real crisis which confronted the Christian communities emanated not from the Orient nor from Greece, but from Rome. And it was the gravest crisis the Church had ever had to face. In recognising this, we pin-point the actual historical basis of the inspired work we are now about to examine.

As has already been demonstrated, the syncretic movement was an inevitable result of events that had swept away all the religious and political arrangements of the ancient world. The conquests of the Macedonian Empire, followed by those of Rome, completely overturned the established standard of values. Uniting in their vast dominions people of many different customs and cultures, the conquerors and their successors could only keep the machinery of government running smoothly by making certain concessions to the religious sensibilities of the vanquished. Instead of imposing the cults of Greece and Rome on their new subjects, they allowed them (with a few isolated exceptions of no great importance) a certain liberty in religious matters. Tolerance on this point was, after all, a conciliatory gesture they could afford to make; it helped to keep the peace and saved a good deal of trouble.

They had nothing to lose politically by encouraging a free exchange of religious thought to keep people's minds occupied. When fusions of ideas took place they were, indeed, all in the conqueror's favour. Even if he had been in a position to enforce uniformity, the process of shackling thought would only have driven the movement underground, and would almost certainly have led to political intrigues of far graver consequence. Thus the danger of political unrest was minimised. Rome had everything to gain by allowing the

subject-races complete self-determination in religious matters.

But there was another side to the picture. Up to this time, the vast political machine had derived its main driving force from the religious sentiments ranged solidly behind it. Having severed the ties that in popular belief linked it with the divine, the state ran the risk of losing that mysterious aura of omnipotence which had served it so usefully in the past. Reduced so to speak to a lay state, what authority could the Empire hope to exercise over vast populations superlatively skilled in religious argument?

With her genius for political discernment, Rome quickly sensed the danger and took steps to regain her former religious prestige. Not by forbidding the people to worship their old gods, but by setting up new ones. Because it was obviously impossible to impose whole pantheons of her own on the rest of the inhabited world, Rome simplified matters by the convenient expedient of turning her Emperors into gods. The Emperors themselves saw to this. Were they not merely following the precedent of the ancient Egyptian Pharaohs who, after exploiting for their own advantage the multitude of pantheons in their vast realm, ended by demanding not the exclusive, but certainly the obligatory adoration of their subjects for themselves? What difficulty could arise from reviving this policy, at a time when syncretism anyhow was sweeping away all kinds of out-moded scruples of conscience? After all, one more new cult could not upset anyone; it was the fashion. The adoration which Rome demanded meant no more than the official recognition of the titular divinity who now presided over the destinies of the entire known world.

Here we have the essence of the brilliant idea which inspired the cult of Rome and the Imperial cult. It was purely political. We need not go into history to trace its progress step by step. If the divinity of Rome was recognised a whole century before the Apocalypse; if the Emperors were deified subsequently, but only after their death; if Julius Caesar was the first to be the object of veneration during his lifetime; if that cult was extended, especially in the East, during the reign and greatly to the benefit of his immediate

successor; if nevertheless the compulsory veneration of the Emperor did not pass into law until the end of the second or third century, all these details are of secondary importance, and do not alter in the least the essential fact that something new and important was in process of development about this time. The Empire had the power, and was fully determined to press the conscience of its subjects into its service for political ends.

Where had this movement arrived at the time of Domitian, and does the testimony of the Apocalypse agree with evidence we can obtain elsewhere?

In chapter 13 of his 'Life of Domitian', Suetonius gives many examples which point to the Emperor's obsession with his belief in his own divinity. He claimed succession by divine right before the Senate. He expressed himself in terms which left no doubt that he considered himself one of the gods. He ordered the Flavian priests to engrave his likeness, side by side with those of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, on the golden crowns which he wore at certain festivals (Suetonius 4). And it was in keeping with the same claim that he caused himself to be addressed as 'Lord' in the amphitheatre, this being the title reserved for the divine. Furthermore, he enacted that all official documents should endorse this distinction, for he was to be addressed in them as 'Our Lord and God'.

There cannot be any doubt that an essential difference existed between the emperors who acquiesced in the cult for purely political purposes, and the sanguinary, half-mad sadist, Domitian, who—at any rate during his later years—was completely convinced of his personal divinity, and made no scruple of imposing the cult even upon his own immediate circle. He had his cousin, Flavius Clemens, executed—although he adopted this man's children. Flavius Clemens's crime was that of 'impiety'. And if this was ground sufficient for the death sentence on a near relative, can we question the fate that would befall Christians refusing to participate in the idolatrous worship? Theirs was not merely atheism in the usual sense, but treason against the Emperor as well. It was quite sufficient grounds for the persecution which followed.

There was not at that time, any more than in the time of Nero (notwithstanding the opinion of certain historians) any law against the Christians as such; at any rate, no known document enables us to establish the existence of such a law. The Christians were still numerically insignificant and not of sufficient importance for Rome to take much notice of them. If they were to be harassed, it was only necessary to apply the universal rule which required every foreign cult to obtain the Senate's recognition, which they had not done; or that which compelled all subjects of the Empire to subscribe to the Imperial cult. Flavius Clemens, despite his close relationship and friendship with the Emperor, could claim no mercy; he appears to have fallen victim to the demand which Domitian, in his pretensions to divinity, enforced without exception. I should be inclined even to put these pretensions down in some measure to the necessities of Domitian's treasury. That would explain the persecution with which he pursued even the Jews. Their Temple having been destroyed by Titus, his brother and immediate predecessor, Domitian had decided that the money formerly raised by the Jews for the support of their national sanctuary should in future be delivered to the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol. Now this was the one which Domitian used for his own cult. The tardiness of the Jews in responding to this demand may have exasperated the Emperor no less than their obstinate monotheism. It is even possible that he looked upon Christians as proselytes who 'lived like Jews' without declaring themselves as such—or as persons who 'denied their origin' with a view to evading the taxes imposed upon Israel. (Suetonius, 12.)

However this may be, it is an undoubted fact that Domitian appears in Christian history as the author of the second and extremely violent persecution. Tertullian says of him: (Apolog., 5) '*Portio Neronis de crudelitate*' and we have quoted the chapter in which Eusebius writes to the same effect almost within a century of Tertullian's time.

Taken all in all, it was probably a persecution less bloody than that of Nero. That at least was the opinion of Tertullian. But at the same time, one is obliged to recognise it was

a persecution with more far-reaching repercussions, from the point of view of the principles involved. Nero was able practically to exterminate the Christian communities in Rome, and perhaps in all Italy, by holding them up, in the eyes of the public, as the persons responsible for all the afflictions they had laid at the Emperor's door. But everyone knew that this was pure calumny, for there was nothing in the new doctrine that would encourage law-breaking. It would seem moreover that this persecution was confined mainly to Rome, and did not extend far into the provinces. Domitian's persecution, on the other hand, raised a question of principle which could not fail sooner or later to produce the most shattering consequences. Under Nero the Christians were put to the test but their faith remained unshaken. This same faith was the mainspring of the message of Patmos, and the very language the aged apostle uses to drive home his arguments gives us some idea of the appalling menace that threatened the Church, through the pretensions of Domitian and the power of Rome.

What sort of communities were they, to whom the apostle addressed his communications, and what were the precepts he wished to impress upon them? It is worth noting that, of the seven towns mentioned, five are known to us as having possessed a sanctuary for the imperial cult; Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis and Philadelphia, and it is more than probable that Thyatira and Laodicea were equally equipped. Ephesus, which is mentioned first, was doubtless more important than all the others, if not already earmarked as the future metropolis of the hierarchy emerging in the Christian communities from apostolic origins. But we must not lose sight of the fact that the Imperial cult, introduced into the celebrated temple of Artemis of the Ephesians (Cf. Acts 19, 28 ff.) also flourished here. The cult was similarly entrenched in Smyrna, where the holy bishop Polycarp, less than a half-century later, suffered martyrdom for refusing to declare 'Caesar is the Lord' (Eusebius, H.E. IV, XV, 15). We need have no doubt that the problem was also a very real one at the time of Domitian. As for Pergamos, we know that worship of the Emperor-god had been going

on there for more than a century, and had reached a point of fanatical zeal. The particularly vivid passage in which the Apocalyptic letter to the Church of that town praises Antipas, the faithful witness of Christ who gave supreme proof of his faith even at 'the very seat of Satan' (2, 13) brings the conditions in Pergamos right home to us. Let there be no mistake about it; even without proceeding to the main teachings of the book—and we shall see that they all combine in the same sense—this was the fundamental problem the heavenly message aimed to answer. It was not this, that or the other persecution that struck at the root of the Christian faith; the faithful had been warned by their master that they must be prepared to suffer. And they were prepared for martyrdom. But this was a different kind of persecution. For the first time it came, not as a challenging dramatic climax, but as a detail of day-to-day existence, confronting their faith in Christ and in the Church with the question of their whole future. Faced with a trial which proceeded not only from the brutality of a tyrant actuated by self-interest, but also from the relentless compulsion of the political machine, what were they to think? Not, certainly, of the question of worshipping Caesar, which they could but refuse, but of the ultimate issue of the unequal struggle with the whole power of the State on which the Church had manifestly embarked. Obviously there could be no possible compromise between Christian conscience and the demands of Caesar-worship. But would this state of affairs go on and on, endlessly, and in that case would the Church be strong enough to survive the trial? It seemed reduced to a mere question of survival; and what then became of all the prospects universal evangelisation had opened up, to say nothing of the Messianic triumphs, hope of which the Christians had inherited from their Israelite ancestors? Either Rome would have to give up deifying itself—and Domitian seemed headed in quite the opposite direction—or the Church would have to vanquish Rome; but when, and in what way? Such were the problems that rocked the very foundations of Christian faith in Asia, and that prompted

the seer of Patmos to throw inspired light on the future of Christianity.

Now that we have located the message of Patmos in general history, let us take a look at the religious atmosphere in which the people to whom it was addressed were living. History has given us a rough idea—a very superficial one, incidentally—of the object in view when the Apocalypse was written. Closer examination of the recipients leads us to certain conclusions on the class of literature to which the work belongs, and the actual manner in which the message is expressed.

Useful—indeed, indispensable—as it is to have an intimate knowledge of ecclesiastical history, and especially that of the syncretic movement, in studying the Apocalypse, this approach, it cannot be denied, has often been abused. Many commentators have tended to overlook the fundamental truth that applies to all problems concerned with the origins of Christianity, namely, that it grew out of Judaism and was nurtured to maturity in this native environment. This applies both to its doctrines and to its spiritual aspirations. It is also true of the first Christian communities and of Christianity's collective institutions from the earliest days. It sounds like a platitude; but very often the most obvious truths, based on common sense, tend to be forgotten in practice. Let us pause for a moment and ask ourselves how much we should understand of the gospels; of our Lord's progress on earth and of his apostles; of the difficulties they encountered in first spreading the doctrine of Christianity throughout the Mediterranean world, if we knew nothing of the Old Testament, nor of contemporary Judaism in our era, nor of the part it played in the Roman Empire and especially in the great trade centres of the Mediterranean. Need we remind ourselves that the great majority of apostolic teachings, not excluding those of St Paul, the apostle of the gentiles, were first launched in the synagogue? Or that Jesus Christ represented the Messianic tradition which of all others was most essentially Jewish? We also know of some exceptions to this initial method, some attempts to make direct contact with

the pagan world, which were not conspicuously successful—St Paul at the Areopagus, for instance. Born on the spiritual soil of Israel, Christianity took its first faltering steps in the shadow of the synagogue. It was not until later that it penetrated effectively into the pagan world.

Consequently—and so many works on Christian origins seem to overlook this—all questions concerning these origins should take the Hebrew spiritual background as their starting point. Only in this way will the historian discover the best means to clarify the problem he has set himself. He should not attempt to extend his investigations to the pagan religions which, at the beginning of our era, impinged on the lives of quite as many Jews as Christians in the Mediterranean cities, until he has thoroughly dug over this field.

This applies especially to the care with which one should approach the study of the Apocalypse. Before exploring the most remote and unexpected connections with Grecian, Oriental and far-Eastern religions, we ought to recognise that here we have a book that is linked with the Israelite tradition by a thousand literary and religious ties. Although its major themes—which we shall deal with more particularly in the ensuing chapters—may be dressed up in the Grecian mode and coloured by allusions to paganism, the Apocalypse is quite a typical Hebrew-Christian product. This is all the more remarkable because it shows how much, in the first century, Christianity was still dependent on the Hebrew tradition—at a time when unquestionably the majority of the communities in Asia Minor must have sprung from gentile circles. The Apocalypse goes back to Jewish sources both for its manner of presentation and for its basic religious themes. Let us briefly run over the points which most clearly reveal this derivation, and which it is most important to recognise if we are to understand this inspired book. From mere externals we can penetrate to the most fruitful sources of inspiration.

The style of the book—so disconcerting to the uninitiated modern reader—places it unmistakably in the class of Jewish Apocryphal literature. In the Old Testament the book of Daniel is the best example of this style, though one can

trace many other prototypes, in the Wisdom books, for instance, in the collection of the Psalms, especially in Prophets, and even in some passages of the Pentateuch. Many Apocrypha, both in Judaism and in Christianity, have exploited this style. Although the Apocalypse of St John has become the most widely-known and the most representative of this class of literature, it is by no means the first of its kind ever to have been written. It derived its rules and its essential mode of expression from precedents established centuries before. We need only stress that it is the *chef-d'oeuvre* of its kind, and that the essential characteristics are here found in a development of perfection no other book of this class known to us has attained.

The style continually falls back on allegorical illustrations. Celestial thrones, Elders, the Four Beasts, the Dragon and the Beasts, horsemen in different colours, opposing armies, the Temple which the prophet measures, and the City which he sees descending from heaven—all these make no sense, and have still less interest, if one takes them literally. They are symbols of other realities, which we are expected to discover for ourselves.

In the allegorical language of apocalyptic literature it is especially important to note the recurrence of numbers. All these have a symbolic value, and it is sheer waste of time to calculate them by the rules of arithmetic. Number 3 is readily recognised as divine; 4, which recalls the four winds of heaven or the four corners of the earth, is often of cosmic significance; 7 indicates abundance, perfection, and it also contains both four and three, which opens up great possibilities, the author exercising his ingenuity on sevens in two series, composed respectively of three-four units. Three and a half, seven divided by two, and six (seven minus one) are considered to be less than perfect; six can even be stretched to suggest a ridiculous pretence of perfection, a perfection which is unattainable. Using another method, whereby a name is expressed by the number-values of its letters, the adventure may end in a succession of six (666), and here is a means of ridiculing the pretensions of Nero, the persecutor. Twelve also falls short of complete perfection and it is a

favourite number with our author when referring to the Church; there are twelve doors in the celestial Jerusalem, just as there are twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles of the Lamb—and when it comes to hinting at the countless multitudes of the elect, he speaks of one hundred and forty-four thousand, which is equal to the square of twelve multiplied by a thousand—an incalculable total. He uses the same method for indicating the immensity and divinity of the holy Jerusalem, which he sees in three dimensions, each of twelve thousand strades—three, twelve and a thousand therefore make up the total, which defies imagination but is rich in doctrinal suggestion. The number of times certain characteristic expressions are used in the book, obviously intentionally, is another matter that should not be overlooked, quite apart from the study of numbers, to which I have referred. Thus ‘Christ’ recurs exactly seven times, three times accompanied by ‘Jesus’, which is itself used fourteen times (twice seven). Sentences commencing ‘blessed’ are seven in number. One might also wonder if it is by mere chance that there are twenty-eight (four times seven) mentions of ‘the Lamb’ against twelve of the Dragon; that seven passages prophesy the sovereignty of Christ and his saints, seven others the lamentations called forth by the punishments of the ungodly, while the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ are mentioned six times, and there are ten kings, and so on. These examples will suffice to warn the reader unaccustomed to this class of literature that numbers in our book are meant to be accepted for their symbolic value—their arithmetical significance is negligible. The symbol holds the clue. Now this is not peculiar to the Apocalypse of St John. It fits perfectly into the mould of Jewish apocalyptic literature, to which by its characteristic style it actually belongs, although there may possibly be an earlier connection with Pythagorean speculations on the subject of numbers.

What is true of numbers applies even more forcibly to the apocalyptic metaphors or allegories. The author follows his Jewish predecessors in his complete disregard for coherence in the images and comparisons he uses. It is just as futile to seek consistency here, as to calculate the proportions

expressed in numbers. The same fact and the same teaching may be conveyed, sometimes on the same page, by two metaphors having no possible connection. On the other hand, the same metaphor may illustrate two completely opposite truths or mysteries. Thus the Church is turn-by-turn a woman, a temple, a city, a bride; but again the image of a woman may successively be evoked to suggest the divine mystery of the Church, and prostituted Rome. We must not therefore expect coherence on the imaginative plane, but look for it only in the ideas or teachings which the illustrations express. It is easy to lay down this rule but not so simple to follow it, especially for the western type of mentality, confused and readily put off by this rapid succession of scintillating, disjointed metaphors. Systematic reading, especially aloud, will help to overcome the difficulty. One gradually begins to appreciate the evocative power which this somewhat lavish use of allegory conveys. Even the occasional redundance which one is inclined to criticise at a superficial reading becomes less irksome when the mind, skipping the allegorical illustrations which at first make it stumble, follows the prophet of Patmos into the human and divine mysteries which are offered for contemplation.

So much for the elements of style. There is no need to dwell on the question of rhythm, although in my opinion the Apocalypse has a very definite rhythm of its own. In the original text, declamation is often marked by the almost arbitrary repetition of the conjunction 'and' and the very conscious use or omission of the definite article, by its repetition before certain adjectives or participles qualifying the principal nouns of the phrase, or by a collection of genitives. Noticeable, too, is the frequent use of a sudden parenthesis which, holding the flow in suspense for an instant, underlines the rhythm. Occasional grammatical errors, due to the author's semitic background, make many an apocalyptic phrase more vivid, even if not more refined. Here, too, reading aloud helps one little by little to enter into the swing of the inspired poem.

The development of a literary composition is a long process, and to trace it step by step requires much explora-

tion. Let us lay down just a few simple rules, which we must be aware of in order to follow the author's train of thought without too many stumbling-blocks. There is no need to underline the septenaries; these are quite obvious. Indeed, in some quarters there is even an inclination to regard this feature as the guiding principle of the book, dividing it into seven successive septenaries. Four of them are explicitly mentioned by the author; the determination of the other three is open to argument. Anyhow, every hypothesis requires an all-over frame, embracing the succession of precepts communicated rather than a hard-and-fast principle of interpretation.

The law of antithesis is more dependable. It applies as much to the major doctrinal teachings of the book as to its literary method. Thus we can line up a long parallel series of antithetic facts and mysteries or phenomenal manifestations that run right through the book. The Lamb and the Dragon, the inhabitants of the earth who have erected their tents with God in heaven, the Church militant and the Church triumphant, pagan Rome and the Christians who are persecuted by it, the two witnesses and the two beasts—all these illustrations which represent fundamentally the same mysteries of good and evil, or, more often, truth and falsehood, are brought together from one end of the book to the other, and, in the details of the visions and allegories, they give it a profound unity. As this applies to the whole, it is also very often true of the substance of a pericope—the triumph of good conjures up the agitation and the overthrow of evil. Father Allo is very insistent on this point.

Another characteristic consists of the frequent repetition at the commencement and end of a teaching; we meet a typical illustration in the opening lines, and it comes up again at the conclusion. Father Allo traces this trick right through the book. It is worth noting that the titles of Christ, figures of speech like the Tree of Life, the fountains of living waters, and so on (borrowed, by the way, from Genesis) or again, the announcement of the imminent coming of the Lord, figure almost identically in the foreword to the letters on the one hand, and the epilogue on the other. Many of the

pericopes furnish further examples of the same method. Most of the letters to the Churches also endorse it; the first words he addresses to them correspond with the exhortation at the end. For example, in the scourge of the fifth trumpet, the author mentions, in the beginning, the bottomless pit which is opened by the fall of the mysterious star from heaven (9, 2) and then at the end he tells us that the scorpions are for the king of the angels of the Abyss (9, 11). Once one knows what to look for, countless examples will crop up in the course of one's reading.

More important still, and more original, is the method which Father Allo calls 'jointing'. This is how he defines it: 'While a vision is in progress, and generally towards the end, the seer suddenly suspends the action, in order to build up a new revelation later. I said revelation; but more often it really explains a point in a vision that preceded it, and strikes the reader all the more forcibly on that account. His imagination is quickened. He is held breathless with expectancy until God and the prophet see fit to give further explanation.' (*L'Apocalypse*, p. LXXXV.)

Two points arise here. If on the one hand a septenary, or a description of the fifth or the sixth element, is contained in a vision, generally there is a bait which can be made the subject of the vision or the teachings that follow. If on the other hand such a foretaste is lacking, the teachings given will round up others given on an earlier occasion. Let us look at one or two examples. In chapter 6, when the Lamb opens the fifth seal, the martyrs, impatient for just vengeance, are persuaded to wait a little 'until the number of their brethren, who should be killed as they were, shall be fulfilled' (6, 11). When we come to the opening of the sixth seal, and the cosmic cataclysms that precede the end of time, the action is suddenly suspended, and we pass on to Chapter 7, where we are told in detail the numbers (innumerable!) of the elect whose presence proclaims the deferred justice of heaven and their salvation by the blood of martyrs. Another instance. In the course of the vision of the infernal battle started by the sounding of the sixth trumpet (9, 13) John sees the mighty Angel carrying the little book

(10, 1). In Chapter 11, 1-14, he briefly describes the contents of the little book, before the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which links up with the events of the previous chapter, and foreshadows again the impending end. In reality the tit-bit about the little book is just a foretaste of the whole prophetic section that follows (11, 19) which takes up in detail the various elements briefly hinted at in the first announcement.

By this method, which he applies with the greatest freedom, the author keeps all the aims of his book closely knit. And this, we may be sure, was quite deliberate. It was carried out with the greatest calculation, passing from diminishing generalities to considered facts. After a somewhat abstract glance at the whole of human history, he gradually narrows the field. At the same time, whatever may be lost in the process of contraction is amply made up by the increased intensity of vision that plays upon successive developments. Step by step the prophet passes in review concrete and actual historical facts, even bringing details into the picture, such as references to living personalities, and Roman emperors associated with the persecution of the Christians.

And here is the most important point—one also completely in accordance with the apocalyptic style of writing. Every new prospect opened up invariably finishes in the same way, namely, with the end of the world. Even when he is dealing with contemporary affairs, or with the past, the prophet always has an eye to the future. Thought is prophetically directed to the great ἔσχατον. Of this traditional technique our book is a very typical example. It emerges from the very first vivid lines of prophecy (1, 6-7) as well as from each of the septenaries (of which the fifth or sixth element conjures up the last great trials of sinful humanity prior to the last judgement and the triumph of Christ and the saints). It also characterises each of the great divisions, and the general trend of the book, which links the successive divine judgements in the course of history with the final judgement and the heavenly Jerusalem. It must never be lost from view that this theme dominates the whole of the book's message. All its teachings, all its prophecies, hinge upon the end of the world. The progression, let us hasten to add, does

not take place in strict chronological order. The successive elements in a septenary do not necessarily correspond with any given period of time as we know it. But in this one respect the visions or revelations all agree; they end in full ἔσχατον. The apocalyptic style cannot be separated from exhortations, visions and eschatologies; they form the basis of the pre-conceived picture, and of this class of literature our book is absolutely typical.

Here we perceive the basic distinction between books like this one, which are prophetic in the correct and limited sense of the term, and those which represent what we nowadays call a theology of history, because they confine themselves to the concrete march of events, and remain aloof from dealings with the future. Clearly, the teaching conveyed, for instance, in the breaking of the seven seals of the Book of the Lamb, although it ends in the usual apocalyptic style with a delineation of cosmic catastrophes (sixth seal) cannot be identified with actual historical events. The rider on the white horse, and the four malignant riders, are in action simultaneously, and not one after the other, throughout the whole of history. It soon becomes clear that it is the first rider, recognisable as evangelical truth, who will have the last word. The same applies to the trumpets, the judgements, the cups, and so on. For although the object throughout the whole series is to conjure up the end of the world, we are not justified in relating this repeated climax to actual facts in the sequence of historical events.

But it would be equally wrong to deny the book's prophetic function, looking at it from the angle of progressive history. How then can we be sure of the correct line to take? It is not possible to make the climax our starting point, because this invariably has a bearing on the end of the world. So we are forced back to the beginning. If this yields general, and to some extent abstract, pointers to any period of time, one is justified in applying it to history as a whole. The information thus given remains as it were outside the future, considered as such, and applies, though perhaps not quite equally, to all its phases. If on the other hand the start of a new prophetic series concerns an exact period in the historic future, the

prospect opened up remains entirely within that future itself, and, linking within other series of events in the march of time, points to important stages in the ultimate fate of the human race. The message of Patmos then takes on a real prophetic significance. This is our view, and we shall explain in our last chapter that the whole of 17, 1-20, 15, opening with the prediction of the judgement and condemnation of the persecuting Roman Empire, offers the most stupendous clairvoyant prophecy on the progress of history since St John's time, making our Apocalypse the most important prophetic work in the whole of Judeo-Christian literature.

Having discovered how to distinguish between that which is prophetic in an exact sense, and the general principles governing a true interpretation of Christian history, can we combine the two? We believe it is possible, and to demonstrate it is the purpose of this book. Taken all in all, the prophetic predictions only spring from the general affirmations expressed in the visions with which the message opens. And inversely, thanks to the method of procedure which we have outlined, these first visions will shed their divine light on concrete realities of history from which at first sight they may seem very far removed. One can imagine that the faithful had a similar experience, when the message of Patmos was read to them in their assemblies; mysteriously but unmistakably they were led little by little to recognise existing conditions and approaching events in the history of Rome, which revealed the resurrected Christ to them as an irresistible conqueror. The Apocalypse, which derived its penetrating light from heaven, revealed plainly the hard realities of their struggle; but it also threw its heavenly light on the outcome, and gave them the courage to see themselves as they were in Christ—as unvanquishable victors.

The foregoing, we hope, has been sufficient to establish the message of St John as belonging to the prophetic and apocalyptic class of Israelite literature. But it should also be clear that in this class it has reached a magnitude and a perfection never before known. Only two characteristics have been mentioned to establish that style and superiority: prediction and eschatology. One may briefly touch upon a

few others. For instance, the passages connected with God's judgement, or the day of his wrath, or the celestial acclamations that approve his decrees, or even the holy city of Jerusalem. Why did John, who wrote his gospel in a totally different style, choose precisely this one for his message of comfort and encouragement at the time of persecution? It is hardly necessary to ask this question because the answer is so obvious. It was the traditional style the prophets used when they wanted to spur God's people on to believe in their destiny, foretelling the defeat of the nations ranged against God. In fact one could go so far as to say it was the only style the writer of the Apocalypse could have used to convey this particular message. Furthermore, this was not meant to be a book of evangelical catechism, or, in spite of its opening letters, an apostolic epistle like those which were sent by St Paul and which St John himself would soon write; it was not to be a didactic treatise like the epistle to the Hebrews. It was to be above all a prophecy against impious nations, and in favour of the new chosen people, that is to say, the Church. We shall have to go into this more precisely in analysing the internal and doctrinal structure of the document itself. But even at this point it must be clear that anyone wanting to make real progress in the understanding of this mysterious book must seek help from analogous literature, like the books of Daniel, Ezechiel, certain passages of Isaias, the minor prophets and so on, as well as the eschatological discourses and the synoptics; these, rather than anthologies of pagan cults, will yield illuminating information. Only by this kind of study will he perceive, little by little, in their right setting the derivatives and originalities of John's message, for the apostle chose this very characteristic style of writing to express the particular theme he had to convey in the religious tradition of his fathers.

This brings us to the concluding remarks. We have penetrated beyond the literary character of the work to the very source of St John's inspiration, which reveals where the great book links up with the religious tradition of Israel. I want to say something about the use made of the Old

Testament. For my part, I know of nothing in the New Testament, with the possible exception of the epistle to the Hebrews, which borrows so freely and with such pertinence from the old authors. This is so marked that certain passages of the Old Testament called to mind by quotations from John actually serve as a clue to their interpretation. It is perfectly plain that these quotations do not arise by mere chance. There is nothing haphazard about them, such as there might be if mere echoes of old writings had been recalled at random. Each one of them is taken from the book, or that section of the book, which best matches the theme the seer of Patmos happens to be developing at the moment. Sometimes the references even seem to suggest, through a thin disguise, things with the whole of which the listeners might already be familiar—a method doubtless chosen because it would be foolhardy to speak of such things without wrapping them up in mystery. Thus the symbolism of the world's spreading sores, that of the two witnesses, or that of the Beast, would not escape listeners versed in the Judeo-Christian tradition, harmless as they might appear to uninitiated public officers on the watch for any menace to Caesar's prestige, and eager for pretexts to distinguish themselves by the alertness of their vigilance.

Be that as it may, there are quotations from the Old Testament all over the book. The Apocalypse might be likened to a cloth of purely Jewish weave, on which are embroidered the visions in which St John provides the essentially Christian revelation. Suppose a start were made with Daniel and his recital of the triumphs of the Son of Man over the empires of the people of Jahveh and over the potentates of Nabuchodonosor. That would make an excellent prelude for the message of encouragement to the persecuted Christians who perhaps had begun to lose faith in the power of the Messiah to emerge victorious from the struggle with Rome. Then, following Ezechiel, already there would be Jahveh seated in glory amid flashes of lightning, and the apparition of the Son of Man judging the nations, with the mysterious book presented to John, just as Ezechiel of old was permitted to know the prophecy. Exodus, with its

memories of the liberation from Egypt, and the plagues which heaven sent to punish Pharaoh, has its counterpart in the apocalyptic sores showered upon the world at the opening of the seven seals and the sound of the seven trumpets. There we have the whole blue-print.

As for the actual realisation of it, here the Old Testament provides even more precise models of procedure. The mystery of the Church is already foreshadowed in the temple of Ezechiel and its symbolic measurement by means of a reed. The candlesticks of the sanctuary described in Exodus forecast the communities of the heavenly temple which is the Church; and Ezechiel also gives us a pre-view of the holy city which comes down from heaven. Daniel paves the way for the great central revelation of the two Beasts, just as Isaias reveals the fall of Lucifer and the triumphs of the Son of David. We find the solemn beginnings of the terrible judgements on the nations and on the great Roman prostitute in Isaias's prophecies against Tyre, Jeremiah's against Babylon, Ezechiel's against the great town (Tyre) and Joel's against the kings. Amid all this the Psalms sound their praises around the throne of the Lamb. And if it is true that the Jews 'preferred nourishing their religious appetites on the Pentateuch rather than the Prophets',¹ not only the liturgical codes of Exodus and Deuteronomy serve as a frame for the celestial liturgies, but also Genesis, at the very beginning of the book (letters to the Churches) and at the end (vision of the heavenly Jerusalem) give a foretaste of promised beatitude through the Tree of Life and the fountains of living water to be found in heaven with Jahveh. Leading sources of John's inspiration will be found in the reference list at the end of this book, and we shall return to the subject repeatedly in succeeding chapters. There has been no attempt to make a servile compiling of references. John added to the ideas he borrowed from the Israelite tradition the infinitely greater inspiration he derived from Christianity. Whatever originality he introduced, however, we are still forced back to his point of departure in order to understand the full meaning of his message.

¹ M. J. Lagrange, 'Le Judaisme avant Jesus Christ.' Paris 1931. p. XVII.

No other author in the New Testament, not even St Paul, used the Scriptures more precisely or to better purpose. One might say that every quotation betrays a definite intention and conveys a deliberate lesson. The revelation rests on truths already expressed earlier by St Paul and the first Evangelists. It may be said that the last book of the Bible pre-supposes all the others. In a way it recapitulates in a dazzling synthesis the whole history of a world, the origins of which are related in Genesis. Genesis and the Apocalypse are inseparable, the Alpha and Omega of the Judeo-Christian revelation. This should warn us, if we are inclined to forget it, that we must approach our book with a determination to penetrate to the very heart of the revelation, with a deeply religious conviction that it is inspired from beginning to end, and with the perception that only daily reading of the holy Scriptures can give. The Apocalypse was written by a Christian prophet of Jewish extraction for Christian communities to whom the holy books of the old synagogue retained all their authority, all their day-by-day doctrinal influence. These facts take precedence of all the superficial effects the syncretic movement may have had upon it in Asia Minor.

Was this book which today seems so full of mystery to readers who are not initiated (and, in more than one detail, to others besides!) more intelligible to the Christian communities that received it towards the close of the first century? Did they understand all its allegories? Evidently we have no exact information on this point, and it is difficult for the historian to answer these questions precisely. One can only come to the general opinion that the answer is 'Yes'.

Certainly these communities were infinitely closer to Jewish writings than we are today. The essential themes, the symbolism, the literary style, would cause no perplexity to first-century hearers. To be convinced of this, we should re-read not only the inspired writings of the New Testament but also other documents relating to the early days of Christianity. A course of this kind of reading makes it easier to embark upon the Apocalypse.

It is fairly obvious, too, that the constant use of allegory, though it makes things more difficult for readers of a later period, has great advantages in times of persecution. Allusions to contemporary events would have been infinitely easier for those who first received them to understand than they could possibly be long after these events had passed. If despite the lapse of all these centuries we are able to identify with practical certainty the name of the beast as that of Nero, or to recognise this or that Emperor under the horns of the beast, or to detect in the second beast the current Gnostic ideas that were partial to the worship of Caesar; if, further, we read (Domitian, 12) Suetonius's description of the Flavian priests' golden crowns, and automatically remember the golden crowns of the beast with the name of blasphemy on his seven heads (13, 1) how much more easily must St John's contemporaries have accepted and understood these allusions! The letters to the seven Churches also strike one as being full of inferences which must have been crystal-clear at the time, but which completely escape the reader of to-day. Obviously, too, it must have been a great advantage in times of persecution to have at one's command expressions which would be quite unintelligible to interlopers, like Romans, who were not initiated in the literature of that tradition—especially when the book spoke of God's judgements reserved for Rome and the gentiles. Here and there one even seems to detect passages of symbolism which appeared to St John so easy to interpret that he suddenly wrapped them round with more mystery. Thus he formulates the number of the beast (13, 18), suggesting Babylon, that is to say, Rome; and the great prostitute (17, 5) is another instance. We need have no doubt that this book of encouragement was written in such a way that its recipients—and they alone—would understand it perfectly.

It seems indisputable that the first generation of Christians looked upon the message of Patmos as the great book inspired by God to give his Church wisdom and strength during its time of trial and persecution. In proof of this, one need only recall the attention it received even as late as

177 in the letter written to the Churches of Asia by the Church of Lyons during the persecution of Marcus Aurelius (Eusebius, H.E., V. 1ff.). Later, as time rolled on and the historical details alluded to receded from popular memory, the book little by little lost its significance. Its mystery deepening, it began to be looked upon as a timeless message and was made the object of the most fantastic speculations. The march of events developed other resources, and the revelation came to be regarded as an esoteric work having no connection with the concrete realities of history. Still, Christians in all ages did find that they could still return to it and profit by the rich inspiration which sustained their predecessors under the persecution of Domitian. That inspiration has lost none of its value.

CHAPTER II

THE 'KINGDOM OF GOD' OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS AND THE 'KINGDOM OF CHRIST' OF THE APOCALYPSE

We pass from the literary and historical aspects to the doctrinal context. The question arises: which particular stage in the development of early Christian thought does the Apocalypse represent? To what extent does St John's message merely continue the tradition of the past—and in what respect is it an entirely new departure? To answer these questions and to obtain a clearer understanding of the revelation of Patmos, we must first trace the stages by which it was compiled. Without entering into too many details of the historic background, which would need to be very thoroughly studied to bring out all its subtle lights and shades, let us concentrate on two main phases; that of our Lord's own teachings, which the gospels permit us to examine, and that of the first apostolic precepts, particularly those of St Paul.

To understand the immediate import of our Lord's carefully chosen expressions—and the echo they produced in the minds of his audiences—it is necessary to examine them in conjunction with the historic background against which they were uttered. In other words, that of the Jewish people as they then existed, under the dominion of Rome.

Whatever might be the occasional lapses and lack of faith among these people, there can be no question that a great religious and patriotic dream lay dormant in their souls, ready to become imperative the moment some outside stimulus should re-awaken it. This dream embodied the long-awaited kingdom of God. It was an intellectually involved

idea, because the people looked upon this kingdom as the ideal and ultimate structure of human society. An organisation uniting Israel and the gentiles forever under the government of divine law. Emotionally it was also complicated, because in this ideal the two strongest sentiments man is capable of reinforced one another—religion and patriotism. The rising of the Machabees proves how powerful an insurrection springing from such driving forces could be. If only the leaders could have claimed descent from David, what a messianic ‘push’ it would have been! Even in Jesus’s lifetime, the Zealots, in the face of Roman domination, showed to what heights of religious and patriotic fanaticism Israel could rise. Their exasperated nationalism fomented many a revolt. Remembering this, we can appreciate in their proper light certain of the gospel episodes, in which the crowd wished to proclaim Jesus, who himself belonged to the royal house of David, the long-awaited Messiah-king.

It is easy to see that the kingdom of God which Israel dreamed of was a great communal organisation, national, and at the same time what we might call international. It was a theocratic dream, religious and at the same time political, embracing the inhabitants of the whole world in a global union under an institutional charter, the Law of Moses carried to perfection. By persuasion or by force, every section of human society was to be brought under this law. If the wishes or the welfare of the individual received any consideration at all, they were presumed to follow automatically from the healing salvation divinely granted to Israel, and extended by her to the whole world. No one would be able to share in the blessings of the kingdom except by becoming identified with the chosen people of God. It would therefore behove everyone to subscribe to, and observe, the Law of the Jews; to submit to circumcision, to pay the required dues, to keep holy the Sabbath and the feast days; in short, to obey the Law punctiliously. Then they would be entitled to participate in the happiness promised to Israel.

All this, naturally, could add up to a great religious ideal. We need only re-read Psalm 118 to be convinced of this. But

even at the highest estimate, it would make religious values dependent not only on conformity with a law exterior to man, but also on the vicissitudes and misfortunes of the political group of which this law was the charter. The door stood perpetually open for the confusion of political and religious ideas, not to mention the deviations of formal Phariseism so vigorously denounced by Jesus, and legislation which St Paul had occasion to oppose because it was so crippling to internal liberty.

The kingdom of God could only be defined as the active principle of the Messiah himself. He appeared in it as the invincible champion. As to the prophetic characteristics handed down by tradition concerning him, these were either left wrapt in their mystery, or interpreted in the light of personal trials which they foretold. Not much time was wasted over the sufferings of the Servant of Israel. Much more popular were the glorious and proud titles, Son of David and King of Nations. He was to be the great champion and defender of the Law; but, still more, in the service of that law and its universal extension, he was to be the glorious and unassailable King of Israel. After having liberated the chosen people, he was to extend his dominion to the very ends of the earth. With him, Israel, the saints, the Law, would reign forever.

This is the way the prophets, inspired or not, chose to visualise the future prospect, and to emphasise their dreams—dreams which expressed the hopes of the people as a whole. Let us glance at a list of traits of the Messiah compiled by the author of 'The Psalms of Solomon'.

He would judge the people and the nations in wisdom and in justice.

He would have the people under his yoke to serve him.

And they should give glory to God in the full view and knowledge of the whole earth

He would purify Jerusalem and restore it to its original holiness
(. . .)

He himself is above all men like a just king, instructed by God,
And in his time there is no injustice among them,

For all are saints and their King is the Lord Messiah (. . .)

The Lord himself is their King, hope of him who is strong through trust in God,

And he shall give grace to all the nations that fear him
 For he will smite the earth by the word of his mouth, for ever.
 He will bless the people of the Lord, living in wisdom and
 happiness

(. . .) Such is, in God's design, the noble aspect of the King
 of Israel

To raise him on the house of Israel so that he may be its restorer.¹

The vast compass of this role of holiness and triumph led the most inspired of the prophets of the Messiah to depict his transcendence vividly. Isaias recognised in him the fulness of the spirit of Jahveh (Is. 11, 2ff.), and David gave him the truly divine title of Lord (Ps. 110, 1, cf. the utilisation of this text in a rabbinical discussion of Christ with the Pharisees, Matt. 22, 23 ff.). But even with all this, the real grandeur of his personality can only be fully perceived in his combined role. While he had the functions of legislator, judge, king and even priest, it was abundantly clear that he belonged above all to the group, and it was this that gave him definition. Each member of the group depended only upon him in submitting to the laws which he dictated to all. There was nothing to be seen of his acting as direct intermediary between the individual and God. All the more reason for presenting the kingdom of God which he would inaugurate as being in a way dependent on the mystery inherent in his personality. How could one suspect that this transcendent mystery of his being lay hidden in the very structure of the kingdom, when that kingdom was already approached only from its external point of view? If Christianity had developed along the lines of the Jewish conception of the kingdom of God, it would have led to only an elementary Christology, to a purely juristic-ecclesiastical organisation far removed from any doctrine analogous to that of the Mystical Body.

It is hard for us to imagine the emotion aroused when John, son of Zacharias, appeared among the people down there on the banks of Jordan, baptising and announcing in urgent accents: 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!' (Matt. 3, 1-2) and foretelling the imminent approach him who 'shall baptise you in the Holy Ghost and fire'

¹ M. J. Lagrange, 'Le Judaïsme avant Jésus Christ.' Paris 1931. pp. 155 ff.

(Matt. 3, 11). As to the messianic character of this double message, none, not even the most illiterate, could be in any doubt. Inevitably it aroused the deepest religious sentiments, coupled with the re-awakening of lively aspirations towards national independence. The intensity of these feelings could only be increased when Jesus himself appeared on the scene, and was recognised by John in a spiritual transport, the crowd listening with gathering excitement as he took up with even more urgency the theme of his fore-runner: 'The time is accomplished and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel' (Mark 1, 15).

From this point on, we notice the growing rift between the old notion of the kingdom of God and the precepts conveyed in the sermons of Jesus. The kingdom of God was of course the foundation of the whole edifice he intended to build; it was also the focal point on which all thoughts centred. Every one of his listeners ardently desired this long-awaited kingdom of God; and to realise the place it occupied in our Lord's preachings we have only to recall the number of parables that begin: 'The kingdom of God is like unto . . .'¹

We need not enter into all the details here. It is nevertheless necessary to say a few words on the one hand to underline the points of agreement, and the misconceptions which our Lord slowly and patiently set himself to dispel, and on the other hand, how these developments themselves posed a new question, to which it seems to us the Apocalypse gives the most explicit answer.

In the minds of the Jews, as we have said, the kingdom of God was a concept certainly religious, but at the same time political, so that the majority took the religious domination of the Law to be co-incidental with, and dependent upon, the political triumph of their nation. This was a point of view with which our Lord totally disagreed, and from the very outset rejected. The long-awaited Messiah was expected in the role of invincible herald of the holy Law and victorious king leading his nation to political domination of the whole

¹ P. A. Lenoyer has suggested a classification of them in his 'Theology of the New Testament'. Paris, Blond and Gay, 1928. pp. 33 ff., 43 ff.

world. This was the second confusion our Lord set himself to clear up.

We have to look at the teachings of the gospel from this dual point of view. Then we are better able to understand certain things on which our Saviour insisted, and also certain of his attitudes—towards his family, for instance—in which the transition stage between the entirely new understanding of the kingdom, and the old conception of the Messiah, stands out very clearly. We will underline just a few salient points.

First of all, let us agree on terms. One word in the Greek of the gospels may have two or three different corresponding words in a modern language. Hence kingdom (or realm) also sometimes conveys the sense of reign and royalty. We have seen that in Israel, what was primarily expected was a kingdom, that is to say, a collective institution of which the Messiah would be the head—a kingdom that would extend its tentacles to the very ends of the earth. The kingdom which Jesus Christ was about to inaugurate was a reign or a kingship of God over the souls of men. Only from this starting-point would it have any influence on external matters.

Bearing this in mind, it is profitable to re-read the great programme which St Matthew outlines for us. Here the contrast is immediately obvious. It clearly shows that Jesus is promulgating a message he had brought from God; by the tone of the synoptics as they describe it, we can still get an impression of the solemnity of the occasion. Now what did Jesus say to this crowd, standing all worked up and ready to support him in the effort they expected him to make in the interests of political independence—ready, in fact, to press for a holy war of conquest on the world? The very first words strike a note of discord; this was not what the crowd expected. They and he spoke a different language. All the aspirations were reversed. There was no question of the restoration of David's kingdom. Very soon the new prophet showed that the kingdom of God has its origin in the most secret heart of man. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are the meek; for they shall possess the land,' etc. The whole of the Beatitudes pursue

this contrast (Matt. 5, 3 ff. and para. 11) to the point of paradox. The kingdom of God is promised to those most denuded of the normal outward signs of success and power. Nevertheless, it is a kingship, a reign of God installed in the innermost soul. And precisely here, Jesus begins to stress his demands. In these very depths, the foundations of the new and final alliance, which will be the outcome, must be laid. The work of God among men has really nothing directly to do with the fate of laws which are collective and quite external. These external acts are conditioned by the inner intention, the choice by free will in the personal soul of each individual. Only by these secret options can a man enter the kingdom of heaven here on earth; and mankind's whole progress depends on this choice.

Here, and here only, is where any disagreement exists between the Old Law and the New Law. Let us re-read St Matthew in his great statement of comparisons which succeeds the Beatitudes. 'You have heard . . . but I say unto you'. In this résumé of the whole evangelical doctrine, it is immediately obvious that the Law of Jesus does not differ in essentials from that of Moses, either in content or in its objects; these remain the same. The difference lies in the way they affect men's actions, in the way he looks at things. The New Law is concerned with the first inception of the impulse, even before any external act, which could come under a collective law, has been committed. 'You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not kill' (here we have an external act). 'But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother' (in the secrecy of his own heart) 'shall be in danger of the judgement'. 'You have heard that it was said to them of old : Thou shalt not commit adultery' (external act fully covered by the external law). 'But I say unto you that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery in his heart. Again you have heard it said to them of old : Thou shalt not forswear thyself; but I say unto you not to swear at all, but let your speech be : Yea, yea. No, no '—that is to say, confine yourself to words which you yourself, and God within you, know to be strictly true. Briefly, when our Lord

began his work for the kingdom which he was to inaugurate among us, his first task was to persuade his followers that religion and salvation spring from the direction of the heart, and only come under the laws regulating outward acts, even religious acts, of human society in a secondary sense. If the salvation of society, and of all human values, can only come from God, and therefore from the religion which God ordains, then we are warned that divine order in the world depends primarily on the acceptance—or the refusal—which men accord in their hearts to this morality and to this inner religion which Jesus taught.

Do not misunderstand me. This is not a matter of Christianity being a purely 'inner' religion, taking no account of external effects which also form part of our collective life and are necessary to our well-being. To think so would be to leave out of the reckoning charity, which is the first law. Charity's demands are as imperative in the intercourse of men with one another as are the secret relations of each individual with God. Nothing in Christianity can be pleasing to God if it does not also include love of one's neighbour. How then can the kingdom of God in the secrecy of men's hearts be organised into the kingdom of God on earth? Our Lord took care of this by establishing the organisation of the Church, himself laying the foundation of the essential hierarchy on which is based the visible structure for the external expansion of the kingdom of God. If there is no longer a chosen people in the sense of a national and political group, there is still an elect body of believers, the holy race of the baptised, the new Israel which is the Church, and which, inheriting the ancient promises of Abraham, must invisibly extend to the ends of the earth under the direction of St Peter and the apostles, to offer everyone a chance of entering the kingdom of God. All this is clear, and cannot possibly raise any difficulty. What one must stress here is that all these external expansions, as necessary and obligatory as they may be, are but secondary phenomena, and presuppose the essential preliminary which our Lord never failed to preach, and which indeed is the essence of all that is new in his message. The realm of God cannot be truly

born except through personal choice, moral and religious. All the rest, salvation and the progress of temporal society included, are so many additional gifts vouchsafed to mankind.

While our Lord was engaged in the task of correcting the popular notion of God's kingdom, he had also to transmute the notions his audiences had hitherto formed of the Messiah, not only as to his actual role, but more especially in regard to his mysterious personality.

He did not call into question the characteristics attributed to the Messiah by Jewish tradition. Son of Man, Servant of Jahveh, King of Israel, Liberator of the Chosen People, New Moses, Emmanuel—all these he accepted and endorsed, together with the prophetic promises; and both in speech and conduct he appeared careful to vindicate these messianic titles.

To his audiences and even to his apostles, the logical conclusion was that he had come to re-establish the kingdom of Israel. Let us recall the apostles' question on the eve of the Ascension (Acts 1, 6; cf Lk. 9, 11). And again the request of the mother of James and John (Matt. 20, 21): 'Say that these, my two sons, may sit, the one on thy right hand and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom'. All this belongs to the same outlook, I would almost say the same impatience, religious and at the same time patriotic, which prompted so many tentative feelers on the part of the crowd as to the proclamation of his kingdom by Jesus, the son of David—even if it meant a rising against the Romans and a march on Jerusalem.

In the face of these feverish outbursts of messianism, the attitude of Jesus remains always the same. On the one hand he does not trouble to repudiate the titles the crowd bestow upon him. When one day the Pharisees remonstrated and tried to prevent the people from acclaiming him as King, he said that if the people were silenced, the very stones would cry out (Luke 19, 38-40). Doubtless the royal title was not so often applied to him as that of Son of David. Nevertheless he consistently rejected the conception of royalty which was commonly entertained. Whether it came from Satan during

the mysterious Temptation in the desert (Luke 4, 5) or from the crowd after the miraculous distribution of the loaves and fishes (John 6, 15) or after the triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21, 1 etc.) or finally before Pilate at the trial, Jesus always categorically denied any pretensions to political power, and would never permit his cause to be confused with political issues. That was not the best way to establish the kingdom of God which the prophets had promised and which he himself had come to inaugurate. In rendering unto God that which is God's—that is to say everything—the first essential is to distinguish between God's cause and that of Caesar. And furthermore Caesar must also get his due (Matt. 22, 21). In order to bring all human values into line with the divine scheme, one must go to the very roots; that is to say, to the most spiritual essence of man, and politics are powerless on this ground-plan of emotion, thought and desire. Therefore Jesus would not be a king, neither would the apostles after him. The kingdom of God would be no theocracy, of the kind the Jews had so long awaited. The universal and perfect realm which he, the Son of David, was to establish would not follow the lines laid down by Samuel, nor without resistance (1 Sam. 8, 5 ff.) as imagined by the Jewish people. Every attempt to adjust the perfect kingdom of God which Christ was establishing to the dimensions of a political cause would call forth the same rebuke which the mother of James and John received, and even St Peter himself, in the Garden of Olives. Christian politics must above all respect the first laws of the kingdom of God, of which indeed they are only one aspect, and abide by the discrimination of the Master in his reply to the Pharisees on the rights of Caesar (Matt. 22, 21) or in that which he made to Pilate in his palace as Roman governor (John 18, 36-37).

But at this point a problem arises. If the kingdom of God is not first and foremost a temporal organisation, if Christ does not exercise a regal authority on an equal footing with the princes of this world, what are its means of action? Is there anything more powerful than political pressure that he can employ to establish the perfect order in human affairs

that was forecast by the messianic promises? The new kingdom of God must be something quite different in character. Can it be that we must look for the explanation in the equally mysterious character of the Messiah who will establish it? This turns on the transcendent personality of Jesus, and the nature and efficacy of his intervention among us. And this ultimate kingdom of God which he came to inaugurate—would it be the continued out-working, the companion, as it were, of its predecessor, so that we can trace the dependence of the two latter mysteries directly to the first?

Suddenly new light on the message of his forerunner and that of Jesus, and their close connection, dawns upon us. The kingdom of God is at hand, St John the Baptist had said; receive the baptism of penitence and be converted. When he first began his ministry, Jesus took up the same theme, adding: believe in the gospel. (Mk. 1, 15). But from then on, in all circumstances, he never failed to demand faith. Throughout the long tradition of doctors and prophets of Israel such a thing had never been known before; it was an entirely new requirement, and absolutely characteristic of his message. We have pointed out that all his teachings concern the kingdom of God. We might add that all his teachings, like all his miracles and all his acts of mercy, aim at awakening faith. Actually these do not run parallel; they are most often inter-related. Until Jesus came, the religious and patriotic yearning for the kingdom had rested on wishful thinking. But with the coming of Jesus, it was made plain that the kingdom which he was inaugurating could be entered by faith. Just as a temporal monarch conquers and holds his kingdom by force of arms, Jesus would establish his by the preaching of faith. When, after his Resurrection, he declares that all power is given unto him in Heaven and earth, the first use he makes of that power is to send forth his apostles to preach, converting all nations to faith. Their salvation or damnation is made a direct consequence of their acceptance or rejection of this invitation. (Matt. 28, 18; Mk. 16, 15-16). The inter-relationship of the kingdom of God and faith is a gospel axiom too obvious to require emphasis.

But we must go a little farther into the mystery of the new

revelation. What actually is faith? Unquestioning belief in the teaching of Jesus, of course. But that is a thing every prophet requires of those who listen to him. Our Lord never figures as the leader of his people, like his ancestor, David, or like Moses, in his role of legislator, bringing his people in the name of God the charter of a temporal constitution. No; his is a religious message, a message of truth revealed to the innermost heart of all men of goodwill. It is in this role, played first by himself, and continued by his apostles to the end of time—even though it led him to the Passion and his apostles to martyrdom—that he gradually inaugurates and realises the kingdom of God among men. That is why he demands, first and foremost, not obedience to laws, nor submission to a power, but faith.

Of course one might say that in a way this was true even of the other prophets and teachers. But there is more to it in the case of Jesus, as we shall see if we try to understand how the kingdom of God is entirely based on, and owes the manner of its expansion to, the personal mystery of Jesus, a doctrine indispensable to any understanding of the Apocalypse. This surrender which the prophet of Nazareth demands is not only, or even chiefly, adherence to his doctrine but, in the most profound sense, to his own person. It is a surrender which cannot be avoided, and must be absolute. 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him that he hath sent' (Joh. 6, 29). And again: 'For if you believe not that I am he, you shall die in your sin' (Joh. 8, 24). And there are many other texts which insist on the connection between faith and the mysterious person of Jesus. It is not just faith in God—I am speaking of real Christian faith, and not of rationalistic dabbling—which never figures in the gospels except in conjunction with that faith which primarily has Christ as its object. 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him' (Joh. 1, 18; 9, 45). 'No one knoweth who the Son is, but the Father, and the Father, but the Son and to whom the son will reveal him.' (Lk. 10, 22). It is not a revelation in which the Son remains a kind of stranger; it is rather that, in seeing him, as he said to Philip, one sees the

Father (Joh. 14, 9). Christian faith in the mystery of God acts through the person of Jesus, as St Peter so vividly learned at Caesarea (Matt. 16, 16).

There is another and still stronger reason for Christian faith. Whatever particular object it may centre upon in the revelation, Christian faith must first accept the mystery of Jesus and surrender to it. Perhaps this is not always sufficiently insisted upon. Certainly there is no misunderstanding the insistence of Jesus in the gospels when he demands of his disciples a faith which must accept not only what he says, but also himself as speaker. We can easily check that none of the ancient prophets proceeded to this length. But we seem too often to look upon the mystery of Jesus as one among many, and not as a thing at all singular in itself. In reality, it is the one thing that conditions all the rest. Reading the gospel carefully, one soon perceives that its whole morality, the laws of which are the very laws of the new kingdom of God, presuppose a Christology and always go back to it. It is impossible to follow the rules of that morality, in so far as they are characteristic of the gospel, if one does not recognise in them the continuity of this, that or the other aspect of the mystery of Christ. One could quote many examples, and even say that there is not one of the requirements of the New Law which, so far as its original inspiration and evangelical context are concerned, does not appear to be linked with the personal mystery of Jesus Christ, and is not definitely based on Christology.

If, therefore, faith, by which one enters the kingdom of God, or, inversely, by which the kingdom of God is extended on earth, consists above all in surrender to Christ's personality, we begin to see how that mystery could well be the foundation on which the kingdom is based. In the sense that the laws of the latter's structure depend entirely on the former. Far from visualising the Messiah in the role of ruler, as the Jewish tradition did, Christian thought must little by little recognise the true characteristics of the kingdom and their true out-working, both so radically different from those of any political structure, even if theocratic. In this sense, the personality of Jesus is at once seen to dominate both the

kingdom's methods and its powers of expansion. This power and these methods are not those of the political order, as we have seen. To which order, then, do they belong, and what is the royal power exercised by Jesus? It is made clear in many episodes, and particularly in the scene before Pilate. 'Thou sayest that I am king. For this was I born and for this came I into the world; that I should give testimony to the truth' (Joh. 18, 37). His kingdom, his means of action and of domination, his power, are those of truth, for he is himself the Truth. And now we can understand the final commandment: 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth . . . going therefore, teach ye all nations' (Matt. 28, 18-19). The propagation of faith will be the instrument of Jesus Christ's universal domination, the actual way in which he will exercise his regal sway.

But here a problem which did not exist in the Jewish conception of the kingdom begins to raise its head. Would the nations accept the truth, and if not, would their refusal prove a set-back to the perfect kingdom of God? We know that the Jews thought in terms of force and political pressure when picturing the establishment of God's universal domination. These means being discarded, what chance had truth alone of winning through? This question must occur to us. And we may be sure it occurred still more forcibly, if somewhat confusedly, to the Jews in Jesus's time, who were less capable than we are of conceiving a kingdom other than in the form of a theocracy pressing political power into the service of religious truth. Even among the disciples there were several who often found the somewhat indifferent and complaisant tolerance of Jesus towards constituted powers disconcerting. His friendly attitude towards the gentiles and to the Roman Empire was not at all shared by the average Jew. They could not help speculating on the possible relationship between the new kingdom of God and the temporal order of society, and it seemed questionable whether such methods could eventually lead to the fulfilment of the old prophecies concerning the universal domination of the Messiah over the nations. One can understand the feelings which produced such

expressions of current ideas as 'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1, 6). That dream continued to persist.

One can look at the matter from another angle and ask how the nations themselves, accustomed to order their temporal affairs to an established pattern, would fare under the new dispensation. Having once distinguished between the realm of Caesar and that of God, and having established the latter, individually and collectively, on the foundation of faith in Christ, would the former cease to hold any interest and to share in the divine blessing? The kingdom of Israel and of the chosen race being at an end, such at least as it was in the centuries of preparation, would the political order as such be excluded from the kingdom of God, without hope and without any right to count on the resources of salvation, a stranger forever to the definite alliance between God and man? Would Christians not only be required to give preference to the kingdom of heaven, which indeed was not difficult, but even to abstain from any interest in the world, abandoning it beyond all redemption to the powers of evil? Without doubt, the second coming of Christ, anticipated at any moment, simplified the problem for a great many in the early days. Nevertheless, there was still a problem which sooner or later the disciples would have to face. If it be necessary to distinguish in order to straighten things out, our Lord had with the utmost precision distinguished the kingdom of God from that of Caesar; but it was less easy to see how the two could be brought together, even if one wished to do so. And if the two could not be reconciled, what sense was there in the messianic prophecies foretelling universal domination over the nations?

Did St Paul and the other first apostolic writers offer any solution to this problem? It is clear that from the start all the teachings of Jesus centred round the kingdom of God. Those of St Paul and the apostles, on the other hand, hinged from the beginning on the mystery of Jesus Christ. What we have already said dispenses us from showing that despite this apparent displacement of the centre of perspective, there is

undeviating continuity between the two first stages of doctrinal Christian history. Examining the gospel message as a whole in its original characters, it seems inevitable that Christology should have become the centre of Christian doctrine, as it is in St Paul.

Now, what we must underline here is that this Christology is in line with the preachings of our Lord himself in all essentials, I mean, in being not greatly concerned with the sphere of temporal and political values. The Pauline mystery of Christ is certainly of great importance for the public at large—but the community of which it is the very foundation is none other than the Church, and nothing new is said about the relationship existing between this and the political order. What a contrast between the Pauline mystery of the Christ and the Church, and the role which Israel assigned to the Messiah dominating the nations in the midst of his people! And this in such a short space of time, and in the very same circles! St Paul's mystery of Christ is quite beyond the man of politics, and furthermore, at least at first sight, has no aspect that might cause him anxiety. It can only be shared by the essential courage of faith; faith which quite clearly has no traffic with any nationalistic aspirations whatsoever. The more St Paul studies the mystery of Christ, the more he—the one-time zealot for the Law of Israel—leaves the temporal order of things behind him. Whether we speak of the presence of Christ, by faith, in the Christian soul; of the mystery of the Son of God which is communicated to us in Christ; of participation through the sacrament of baptism or Holy Communion in the salvation of the Passion and the Resurrection; of the all-embracing unity of the Body of Christ in which all Christians are one—all these seem to leave the realities of the collective temporal order altogether on one side. The community which began to be constituted around the new doctrine was purely religious in character; here all were alike, and the distinctions Jew, Greek, pagan, slave and freedman were no longer recognised. Despite the sad attachment which his patriotism maintained for it, St Paul from now on speaks of Israel only in order to underline the benefits conferred on Jews, Greeks and gentiles alike

when they formed part of the New Israel, Israel not according to the flesh (1, Cor. 10, 8), but according to the promise (Rom. 9, 6 ff.). The time had arrived for the universal inheritance of the children of Abraham, father of believers, a heritage which knew no frontiers and was governed by no particular political law. All men of faith were from now on the true sons of Abraham (Gal. 3, 7), the only authentic heirs to the benefits of God's promises made in earlier times, and of the perfect alliance which came into being with the advent of Jesus (Gal. 3, 39 and the whole of the epistle to the Hebrews).

Up to the year 70 or thereabouts, a Jewish community certainly still existed. One of the greatest difficulties of primitive Christianity was to establish that its cause had nothing in common with that community. Many crises had to be passed through, though they were concerned more with practice than with actual divergencies of doctrine. From the first days of the apostolate, St Peter spoke of the Holy Spirit and of the wonders that accompanied the conversion of the centurion Cornelius, showing that it was not necessary to be a member of the Jewish community in order to enter into the religious community of Christ (Acts 10, ff.). The gifts of the Holy Spirit were not reserved for those who had come from Jewry; the chief of the apostles repeatedly stressed that it was the will of God that the gospel should be announced to the gentiles (Acts 15, 7-9). Now here was a new problem: would believers who sprang from the gentiles have to fall in with the laws and customs of the Jews—to constitute, in short, a sort of larger Jewry? There was the affair at Antioch where Paul (and Barnabas) defended the legality of Jews and gentiles in Christianity, in arguing the manifest will of the Holy Spirit in the apostolic campaigns already conducted. The congress of apostles at Jerusalem in 49 or 50 also broached this question, at least in principle. With the reserve of some concessions aimed at preventing the scandal which even the semblance of participation in pagan cults might cause the Jews, it was clearly laid down that Christian communities no longer came under the authority of the Law (Acts 15, 23 ff.). In religious, and still more in political

matters, Christianity thus finally severed its connection with the national and religious destiny of the Jewish community. And if this sorting out of relationships between Christians and Jews took some time in the early communities (see the epistles to the Galatians, Romans, etc.) it had nothing to do with the practice or religious inspiration that caused their differences. Loyalty to the national traditions of Judaism, and, it seems, even to the royal family of David, did not long survive; at most, it was kept alive for a time among the Christian communities of Jerusalem, then at Pella beyond Jordan. Hegesippus tells us that, precisely at the epoch of the Apocalypse, Domitian took umbrage at the claims of some of the relatives of Jesus to be descended, like him, from the race of David (Eusebius, H.E., III, XIX-XX).

But this was only a local and strictly limited episode on the outer fringe of the great Christian movement. If the political authorities were still liable to confuse Jews with Christians under Claudius (*Judaeos impulsore Christo assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit*: Suetonius, Claudius, 25) under Nero this confusion is already no longer possible. It even appears that the former diverted the tyrant's fury to the latter, along with that of the populace (Tacitus, Annals XV, 44; Eusebius H.E. II, XXV). And even if Domitian, at the time of the Apocalypse, found it convenient for financial reasons to pretend once again that the two were identical, soon (under Trajan, for instance) their complete independence of one another could no longer be in any doubt. From a totally detached standpoint Christianity clearly had no connection whatsoever with any political or national cause, and least of all with that of Jewry. Christianity was a purely religious amalgamation of people.

Relationships with other political groups apart from the Jews—which, practically speaking, covers the Roman Empire—proved even less of a problem. Between Rome and the new religion there might at first have been some local conflicts or personal misunderstandings, but they did not involve any question of principle. Pilate, who among the first believers reaped all the odium of condemning Jesus, could never have seriously thought of the king of the Jews

being a menace to the Empire. A few other magistrates were able to misuse the power they derived from Rome against the apostles or against the early communities. Paul and Silas could be imprisoned and beaten, the Churches of Ephesus or of Asia Minor could be persecuted; but these were only local incidents and personal injustices, and it would not be right to read into them any opposition in principle to the new religion on the part of the Empire at that time. Furthermore, how could the Empire at that early period be at all concerned about any threat to its own political aspirations by the universal pretensions of a new sect which had come obscurely out of Palestine? So insignificant was the movement that it took a long time to discover any potential menace, and then the discovery aroused distrust rather than fear.

The apostles on their part do not appear to have caused the political authorities in gentile circles any trouble. There is every evidence that the faithful submitted meekly to the established authorities; that they respected the laws, the impartiality of which they had no reason, moreover, to suspect. By their exemplary conduct they entered into no conflicts; they even prayed for the Emperor and for the heads of constitutional government. But in their secret hearts, the first care of their lives was directed to quite another plane (cf. Rom. the whole of Chap. 13). *Praeterit figura hujus mundi!* (1 Cor. 7, 31). No need to let fugitive incidents detain us! Our Lord alone counted! Soon, perhaps, he would re-appear in his glory to inaugurate the ultimate order of all things. While waiting, and from now on, the Christian's real loyalty, his citizenship and nationality, was fixed with him in heaven (Philipp. 3, 20). They had something better to do than to trouble themselves with earthly matters.

St Peter never speaks in any other terms. 'Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, to refrain yourselves from carnal desires which war against the soul. Having your conversation good among the Gentiles; that whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, by the good works which they shall behold in you, glorify God in the day of visitation. Be ye subject therefore to every human creature for God's sake; whether it be to the king as excelling or to

governors assent by him for the punishment of evil-doers and for the praise of the good. For so is the will of God, that by doing well you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; as free and not as making liberty a cloak for malice, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy; if, for conscience towards God, a man endure sorrows . . .' (1 Pet. 2, 11-19). Briefly, a consistently correct attitude towards social and political authorities, an attitude loyal but indifferent, because the vital interest of the soul was centred elsewhere.

And anyhow, what exception could be taken to the methods of the Roman government? They insured justice and tranquillity at home and abroad; were not these dispensations providential? Paul had no difficulty in reconciling his loyalty as a Roman citizen (and we know with what vehemence he could on occasion claim his rights in this respect (Acts 22-25)) with his religious faith, however monopolising the vital force of his spirit. There was nothing of a revolutionary about Paul. In contrast with what was to come at the time of the Domitian persecutions, there was not one problem of any importance, above all, not a single doctrinal problem, that could entangle the Christian communities in their relations with the political powers of the Roman Empire. Their position was even simpler, more detached, in this respect, than that of the Jewish synagogue before A.D.70. The mystical Church of Christ, in which all believers were incorporated, had less trouble than the synagogue in avoiding an equivocal position; even its recruitment, since it made no distinctions, was proof against any suspicion that it might have political or nationalistic motives. As for the apostles, they were so much occupied in preaching the mystery of Christ and in organising the new-born Churches everywhere, that they appeared not to visualise the immediate universal domination of the Messiah except so far as that domination was in line with the development of the Church. (Cf. Rom. 16, 24, Eph. 4, 7-16, etc.) The

Christology of St Paul leaves scarcely any room for the characteristics by which the Israelite tradition had forecast the universal reign of the Messiah over the nations, and in this the contrast with the Apocalypse is very striking (cf. farther on). The problem of the nations remains quite outside the orbit of the first apostolic preachings, just as it seems to have given very little concern to the Saviour himself. Now this silence is nothing less than remarkable. Let us reflect for a moment on the development of other points in the Christology of St Paul. The first Gnostic speculations, for example, give him the opportunity to present the mystery of Jesus in its cosmic, super-temporal dimensions and therefore properly speaking divine; but although he speaks of the kingship of Jesus, he says nothing of the rights which this royalty will give him among the other kings of this world. God, he writes 'who hath delivered us from the powers of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; in whom we have redemption through his blood, the remission of sins; who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature, for in him were all things created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations, or principalities or powers. All things were created by him and in him, and he is above all and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the Church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he may hold the primacy; because in him it hath well pleased the Father that all the fullness shall dwell, and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, making peace through the blood of his cross' (Col. 1, 13 ff.). The same brilliant delineations occur in the epistles to the Ephesians and the Philippians, the same affirmations of the absolute primacy and dominion of Christ, but also the same vagueness, the same omissions, in all that concerns the actual manner of that terrestrial reign. And it is quite possible that if the great apostle had been pressed for his views on that reign, or the exact part it would play in the temporal order of human affairs, he would have brushed the question aside as being unworthy of attention. The Roman government was favourable to the dissemination of the Christian doctrine;

why bother about anything else? As long as no one fell foul of the established authorities, and lived in peace with others according to the rules of the Republic, he was satisfied to give temporal affairs no more thought than they deserved. The transcendent mystery of Christ, which is the true object of Christian faith, is infinitely worthier of attention than all these things.

Thus, even while they attempted to define the mystery of Christ and the Church in all its magnitude, St Paul and the other witnesses of the first apostolic generation saw it more as a kind of cosmic and supernatural matter than a thing directly affecting the nations of the earth and their temporal history. In this they differed completely from the Israelite prophets, whose messianic forecasts, on the other hand, were always made with prospects of actual domination in view. Even the epistle to the Hebrews, which is so Jewish in context, depicts Christ clearly as the heir of all the promises made to Israel, but even these bear no imprint of the traditional views on Jewish nationalism. Christ, here introduced in the fulness of his rights by virtue of his own sacrifice, is shown more in the character of priest than king. If there is any suggestion of kingship, it is nearer to the Melchisedech conception of it, that is to say, the role of Priest-King, whose sacerdotal function entails all power. Nevertheless, the author maintains, if all the rights of the earth follow as a consequence of the promise made to the Jews, it is by faith that these rights are acquired, and clearly this refers not to mundane realities, but to the invisible and celestial realisation of our hope. In which, to the very end, the Pauline doctrine, while affirming the absolute primacy of Christ and his right without reserve to the heritage of the old promises, remains absolutely faithful to the care our Lord himself took in proclaiming the kingdom of God's radical independence of the collective realities of this world, whether they bear the name of Kingdom of Israel or Roman Empire.

But see how these temporal and political realities, which seemed capable of being regarded as negligible, suddenly force us to be aware of their existence—not only in local conflicts of limited importance, like those that could crop up

in Ephesus or in Corinth, or even in Rome, under the cynic Nero, but in a clash of principles which the most clear-sighted could perceive at once to be irreducible. Domitian, who represents the incarnation of the Roman political order, laid claim to the divine title of Lord (Κυριος), which the Christians reserved exclusively for Jesus and God—for Jesus because he was God. Loyal to Caesar in all other respects, the Christian believer had no choice but to refuse this homage, even at the cost of his life. Thus at Pergamos, where there was at that time a temple to Caesar, Antipas, the faithful witness (2, 13) made the supreme sacrifice. Persecution little by little spread over the whole Empire. The political order of Rome began to take arms against the Church. Who could foresee the end of this conflict in which, obviously, neither side could give way? Rome could not, because she regarded this adoration of Caesar as the only means of assuring the unity of her immense Empire; neither could the Christians, because they could not lend themselves to this idolatry.

In basing itself on principle and in gathering such momentum, the persecution faced believers with a new difficulty. Although, since the founding of the Churches, they had encountered nothing more than local limited opposition, they did know something of these persecutions which their founder had foretold (Matt. 10, 17 ff.), but concerning which he had also told them they need not trouble themselves, because he had overcome the world (Lk. 11, 22; Joh. 16, 33). These trials, they might think, were of short duration, and soon the Churches also would demonstrate, if only in their peaceful development and the increase in their numbers, the triumph of the Resurrection over the gentiles. Now, not only was this progress brought to a sudden halt, but a new and greater persecution faced the Church, not merely from this remote synagogue, or that local carver of idols, but from the whole vast resources of the Empire which had at first appeared to favour the propagation of the truth. Now that the Empire had in its turn become the enemy of Christ, how could one go on talking about the victory of the Resurrection, which had so enchanted the faith of Christians, and of which they

were constantly expecting renewed manifestations? Were not the actual facts a cruel denial of this very triumph? Or should one, facing these concrete facts, counter them by political action, and revolt against the tyrannical pretensions of Caesar by force of arms?

As can be seen, it was in reality the problem of the kingship of Christ that Domitian's persecution raised confusedly in the minds of the Christians. At least we are justified in thinking so, if we refer to the Apocalypse, which is the principal Christian document affording an insight into this crisis, and the great inspired book dealing with that kingship. Let it suffice for the moment to recall that the description of Christ, in this great book, is essentially that of a triumphant king, dominating the nations, if necessary, with a rod of iron. From the address (1, 5), from the first prophetic evocation (1, 7), from the first vision (1, 13) he appears as the Son of Man triumphant over empires, as the Judge before whom all the tribes of the earth are made to tremble. And then, in the unforgettable passage which is the culminating point of St John's message (19, 11-16) he is solemnly declared King of kings and Lord of lords, his name at last being mentioned without mystery (19, 16). Thus the Apocalypse, at the end of the New Testament's revelation, abruptly and with manifestly deliberate intention goes back to the great traditional messianic themes, and the domination of the Messiah over the whole earth.

That this domination posed difficult problems, we shall see. Once the radically spiritual and religious notion of the kingdom of God inherited from Israel had been transformed by the Master; once the super-national and super-temporal precedence of the Church over all temporal and national institutions had been made clear (and with what firmness and insistence!); once the heritage of Israel had been transformed into 'a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people' (1 Pet. 2, 9) what became of the prospects of a universal order realised here on earth, under the leadership of the Messiah—the kingdom of God? Would human communities, those of Israel or of the nations, races and

people, rich and poor, powerful and humble, subjects and kings, all or any of them escape that imperial domination of Christ? (I am not speaking here of the secret religious life of the individual, but precisely of their condition as members of collective society.) All the messianic promises made for centuries had foretold the universal kingship of him whom the chosen people expected. Would they now need to be transferred, making this kingship a matter confined to the inviolable secrecy of the individual conscience of men who gave their faith to Jesus, and postponing to another world, or to his final re-appearance, the redemption of collective values?

It can easily be seen that here was a problem that went beyond the particular crisis of Domitian's day and struck at the very nature of Christianity. It is a problem posed to human thought in every age. Our own age has seen things done against the Church, and promulgated among the masses, not unlike those which were launched among our fathers in the faith when persecutions began. By seeking your salvation in a future life, people have been told, and only fixing your desire on heavenly realities, you are depriving human society of the dynamics and the resources which are within you. The complaint is no new one. It was already being formulated at the time of Domitian against that high personage of royal blood, Flavius Clemens; he showed himself disinterested, it is said, in public matters (Suetonius, Domitian 15). On the other hand, by one of those contradictions that abound in antichristianism, as soon as the Church, appearing to take the preceding complaint seriously, recalls to Christians their responsibilities and their duties in human affairs, there is no lack of critics to protest against what they call the interference of religious authorities. Some even accuse the Church of betraying its founder and the spiritual character of the kingdom of God which it is their duty to preach. Stay in your sacristy, we are told, prepare your discourse for those who are interested in the hereafter, but leave the state to organise mundane society and life here on earth without any interference from you.

Even leaving polemics aside, the dilemma is a serious one,

and can be met with at every turn of Christian history. It forms the real reason for the persecutions of the first three centuries . . . It runs right through the history of the Byzantine Empire, from Constantius II, Constantine's successor, to Photius, and from Michael Cerularius to the collapse in 1453. It was responsible for innumerable crises in the Middle Ages, and a whole library of literature, from Gregory VII to Boniface VIII, illustrates the theme. The English schism, the Gallicanism of France, Febronianism in Austria, and various contemporary 'isms' all spring fundamentally from the same uncertainty. In the great social phenomena of modern times or in the great moral problems which precede them in economic history, the presence of the Church is promptly suspected of intolerable interference, and its absence quickly followed by moral decadence and sanguinary conflicts. When the Church recalls Christ's rights over human society, and the teachings of his morality, which are the only saving grace, it is accused of wishing to install a theocracy which would in fact be contrary to the leading of Christ in the gospel; when nations and society cut themselves adrift from the tutelage of Christian laws, they soon suffer the first disastrous consequences. These then are the recoils of civilisation and what the Christian formed in the school of the Apocalypse must, as we shall see in the following pages, recognise as the sanctions inherent in Christian truth or the judgements of Christ in history. In societies deprived of the only possible salvation, pseudo-messianisms must inevitably be born, expressing the yearning of masses of men and the spirit of the times for a saviour and a king to extricate them from their distress. How the Christian must deplore these aspirations and these religious movements, knowing by his faith that they are blind alleys! Because there is only one Saviour, the one and only King of kings and Lord of lords, for the individual or for society as a whole. But it is necessary for the believer to know the exact nature of that kingship of Christ, and how it operates for the redemption of mankind. In short, the Christian must know how Jesus Christ, ceaselessly preaching by his Church that the kingdom of God is within us, while rendering unto God that

which is God's and unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, is actually the King of kings and Lord of lords. The Apocalypse, of all the books of revelation, is undoubtedly the one which contains the Christian answer to these questions which, in one form or another, have been arising ever since Domitian's time. It is the great theological authority on the universal kingship of Jesus. It is the answer of the New Testament to the prophecies of the Old concerning the domination of the great king, Son of David, over all the nations.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST IN THE APOCALYPSE

'Revelation of Jesus Christ.' These are the first words of the message of St John to the persecuted Churches. No doubts need arise over the genitive; it is Jesus Christ who, through this revelation, 'makes known to his servants the things that must shortly come to pass' (1, 1).

All the same, there has been no lack of commentators to hold the view that St John's intention was to present a 'revelation of Jesus Christ', that is to say, one having Jesus Christ as its object. In order to admonish and encourage the Churches in their time of trial, the exile on Patmos would have wished to give the Churches instruction which, if not quite new, would at least throw additional light on the person and the role of Jesus, 'the faithful witness, the first-begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth' (1, 5). In order to fortify their courage, John set out to prove the complete mastery of the Resurrected one within the framework of contemporary history. The very first doxology shows the preponderance of Christ in the visions which the exiled Apostle will describe.

He who hath loved us

And washed us from our sins in his own blood

—And hath made us a kingdom and priests to God and his Father—

To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1, 5-6.)

The first vision (1, 12 ff.) still further confirms the impression that the book as a whole is dominated by the personality of Jesus, and that all the rest of its contents are like mere rays emanating from that blinding focus of light.

In the foregoing chapter we dealt with the historic circumstances arising out of the relationship between the resurrected Messiah and the impious nations. It seems to us that this is the angle which gives us the best chance of penetrating the mystery of Christ as it was given to John to reveal it in his revelations.

But it would be a mistake to limit one's curiosity to the incidents which impinged upon the great book at that particular period of primitive Christian history. In reality it presents the elements of a genuine Christological synthesis, sometimes by inference, sometimes explicitly formulated. One may even go so far as to say that, of all the writings of the New Testament previous to the fourth gospel, it presents Christology in its most developed form. It derives its major theological contributions from St Paul and the early catechism. The fourth gospel goes little farther than to gather up the various new strands that first appear in the Apocalypse, commencing with the doctrine of the Word. All this amply justifies us in approaching the book by way of its Christology. The Christian vision that comes to us from Patmos is primarily this: a vision of Christ, and a delineation of the invisible but positive part he plays in history. Let us proceed in the manner of the book itself, by successive and complementary evocations, starting with the near and very real presence of the Resurrected one and his universal mastery as king and judge of the nations, by way of the divine mystery of his origin and his person.

The very first impression we get from the opening vision as well as from the letters to the churches is that of his mysterious but very real and immediate presence.

I, John, your brother . . .
 I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet . . .
 And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me.
 And being turned I saw seven golden candlesticks
 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like the Son of Man
 Clothed with a garment down to his feet
 And girt about the paps with a golden girdle
 And his head and his hairs were white

As white wool and as snow
And his eyes were as a flame of fire
And his feet like unto fine brass, as in a burning furnace
And his voice as the sound of many waters
And he had in his right hand seven stars
And from his mouth came out a sharp two-edged sword
And when I had seen him I fell at his feet as dead.
And he laid his right hand upon me saying
'Fear not . . . ' (1, 9 ff.).

And again the opening of the first letter, that to the Church of Ephesus, which shows him coming and going in the midst of the Churches (symbolised precisely in 1, 20 by the golden candlesticks):

'These things saith he who holdeth the seven stars in his right hand and walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks . . . ' (2, 1).

And above all the insistence with which he repeatedly stresses his resurrected life:

'And behold I am living for ever and ever, and Have the keys of death and of hell' (1, 18; cf. 2, 8).

The very tone of the letters drives home the impression of the resurrected Christ's almost tangible presence in the midst of the Churches. Of course it is not only the Apocalypse that deals with the Resurrection of Christ; we know that this was one of the main objects in the preaching of the faith to the first generation of Christians. We already find in St Paul this expression, 'first-begotten among the dead' (Col. 1, 18), which is one of the Apocalyptic titles of Christ (1, 5). But the characteristic thing about St John is the frequency with which he insists on the actual presence of our Lord among the communities of believers who depend upon him. It is here on earth, and not in some distant heaven, that he sees him and shows him (1, 12; 1, 20). We notice that the passage which suggests this is very closely related to the impression the fourth gospel will give in the chapters devoted to the appearances after the Resurrection. Here, as there, Christ appears and disappears, and either makes himself known immediately, or on the contrary simply suggests his mysterious presence, in a progressively unmistakable manner. Briefly, those who share in the experience are aware of an

unmistakable, exciting personal presence which is somehow not in conformity with the laws of the material presence of ordinary human beings. Moreover, in all cases, the awareness of that presence is only shared by the disciples and those who, coming after them, shall be capable of believing without seeing. This is how it was at the time of the Apocalypse. He 'walked' in the midst of the Churches (2, 1), ready to dispossess this one of its primacy (2, 5) or to intervene 'quickly' in the affairs of another (2, 16) threatening the woman Jezabel and those who are led astray by her with punishment (2, 22 ff.) or lingering behind the door, ready to sup with any who will have him (3, 20). The Acts of the Apostles also give this impression of the vivid presence of the resurrected Christ, operating either in his own person, or in that of the Holy Ghost, to further the apostolate. But no other book in the New Testament stresses this so emphatically as the Apocalypse. The most illuminating passage on this theme is to be found at the end of St Matthew's gospel, in which our Lord says: 'Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world' (Matt. 28, 20). Before revealing the apotheosis of Jesus and his Ascension to the mysterious heaven of his divine glory, the revelation of Patmos paints in vivid relief his quickening presence among the Churches. We can see how comforting such an idea must have been. When a fighting regiment knows that its commanding officer is there, sharing the smoke and the heat of battle, that awareness has a far more tonic effect than a message of encouragement conveyed to the fighters by a general seated in glory in some distant palace headquarters.

It is by no means sure whether we Christians of today have been able to keep alive the realistic faith our forefathers had in the Resurrection of Christ. It certainly gave them tremendous power. For the want of it we may fail to grasp the full meaning of the message of St John. If we examine ourselves honestly as to our faith in the Resurrection of Jesus, we may find that our attitude towards it scarcely differs from our attitude towards our own dead—by this I mean that it has scarcely more significance for us than our belief in the immortality of departed souls. We are not at all

excited by it, and we scarcely ever think of dwelling upon its effect on the evolution of world events. Certainly we do not deny the survival of Jesus, any more than we doubt the continued existence of our own departed after death—but we go very little farther to distinguish their case from his. Like them, we picture him in a dis-incarnated, cosmic state, divine, perhaps, but beyond our horizon of imagination, where death puts men with whom, apart from remembrance and prayer, we have no contact until we are all re-united in our Creator at the end of time. There is no communication between the two worlds; they cannot return to help us in our affairs, whatever deeds they have left behind them, or whatever prayers they may offer to God on our behalf. Our dead are no longer personalities playing a part in history. Life goes on without them.

It is to be feared that nowadays we have a similar conception of our Lord's position in regard to our human affairs, and thus we practically deny the Resurrection. Like the women whom the Angel reproached on Easter morning, we go on obstinately looking for 'the living among the dead' though he has already gone before us into Galilee (Lk. 24, 5-6)—that is to say, into the very heart of the world which is our living environment, the 'here' which the Resurrection has enabled him to re-enter triumphantly. By this we reduce the Resurrection to a mere episode of some vague tomorrow, which may perhaps inaugurate a personal triumph for the Crucified one, but has nothing whatever to do with the external progress here on earth of the work he came to do. The Apocalypse teaches us that the real triumph of Jesus's work commenced by virtue of his victory over death, the absolute mastery which gave him the keys of death and hell (1, 18)—and this he has brought back with him into the world. For this reason the resurrected Christ, now present, though invisible, is the foremost and the most active personality in human history.

By what title could he inherit this power? Undoubtedly by his sacrifice. In the Apocalypse, as in the whole of the New Testament, the Passion is inseparable from the Resurrection.

'I was dead. And behold, I am living.' A fleeting but adequate reference to conjure up the Passion. Obviously, this is no new teaching. And at once one gets the impression that St John can scarcely go on without driving home a lesson with which all are already familiar. It might almost be St Paul who is writing the message. For example: 'He who hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood' (1, 5), is from the same workshop as the following from the epistle to the Galatians: 'And I live, now not I: but Christ liveth in me. And that I live now in the flesh: I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and delivered himself for me' (Gal. 2, 20). It is clear that the redemptive Passion is at the heart of all New Testamental Christology and one cannot regard the Apocalypse as being at all singular in this respect. But we very soon become aware that whenever the Passion is mentioned there, it is linked with the idea of the mastery Christ achieved through it. Thus, the King of kings and Lord of lords appears in Chapter 19 'clothed with a garment sprinkled with blood' (19, 13) just as in the apotheosis of Chapter 5 he is depicted as 'a lamb standing, as it were slain' (5, 6). It is precisely in his sufferings that the message of Patmos shows Christ triumphant, and what could have been more heartening to the persecuted churches?

We presently perceive that it is the author's intention to present the Passion of our Lord as his supreme act of testimony. Jesus Christ, in our book, is above all the 'faithful witness' (1, 4), the 'witness faithful and true' (3, 14) who has proved up to the hilt the messianic prophecies of a psalm (Ps. 89, 38). He came in order to bear witness to the truth, as he says before Pilate. He did this even unto death as did Antipas, also a faithful witness, after him (2, 13) and all those who by similar testimony earned the title of overcomers (cf. the ending of each of the letters). Until the end of time, the two mysterious witnesses who represent the Church, and of whom we shall speak later, will be both sacrificed and victorious (11, 3). 'Faithful witness,' 'Lamb as it were slain,' 'First-begotten among the dead,' these three first titles of Jesus in the Apocalypse are directly dependent upon one another and in strict continuity. We shall soon see

that the special lessons the message of Patmos strove to drive home all fit into the frame of the testimony rendered by Christ to truth.

Let us return to the first vision, in which Christ appears to St John to give him his assignment. Perhaps we are wrong in not underlining the one thing which must have struck the original recipients most forcibly, filling them with both terror and consolation. They cannot have failed to recognise in the mysterious being 'like unto the Son of Man' the very same personage in whom Daniel saw the vengeance that could be taken on persecuting and idolatrous empires (Dan. 7, 13)—the vengeance inseparable from the triumph of his people. He, too, is dressed in a white garment, denoting his sacerdotal office, adorned with the regal girdle of gold. His white head and his penetrating glance (Dan. 7, 9) prove that the Ancient of Daniel's day was a divine personage, just as his brazen solidity, contrasting with Nabuchodonosor, and the terrifying sound of his voice, made his domination irresistible to his enemies. In this way, Christ is presented from the start as the triumphant hero who will lead the people of God to victory over the great pagan empires, just as Daniel had prophesied, and no reminder could have been more welcome to the persecuted Churches.

It must certainly have been a thought capable of striking terror into any religious soul schooled by the Old Testament to familiarity with a vengeful God. Inasmuch as we have to some extent become insensible to the mystery of God, it is difficult for us nowadays to realise the full force of such suggestions. The effect of the vision upon St John himself gives us some idea of the hold the old awe had upon him. Although he was the one whom Jesus loved—

'And when I had seen him,

I fell at his feet as dead' (1, 17).

Then, by one of those sudden transitions which abound in this great work we get, side by side with this awesome terror so reminiscent of the Old Testament, the moving evidence of Jesus's gentleness and comfort—

‘And he laid his right hand upon me,
Saying “Fear not”’ (1, 17).

This contrast is maintained right through the book. There are countless instances of the infinite delicacy with which our Lord expresses his tenderness for his own (3, 19-20; 7, 17; 21, 3-4; 21, 7; etc.). Even when it is necessary to show him in the role of judge, we are permitted to detect his solicitude for the elect (14, 14-16) while he leaves to the Angel of Wrath the necessary execution of divine justice. And the whole ends with the sublime peace and intimacy of the marriage of the Lamb, and the holy Jerusalem which is impregnated with his divine light. But, on the whole, the figure of Christ in the Apocalypse has much in common with the vengeful divine manifestations of the Old Testament. Which is none the less reassuring for those who are undergoing the trials of persecution.

The central portion of St John’s prophecies opens with an apotheosis of Christ in that great vision of the thrones in heaven which is inspired by Ezechiel. ‘The things’ (4, 1) are entirely dominated by the omnipotence of God, which is inseparably associated from now on with the omnipotence of the Lamb. So the prophecies do definitely concern the progress of history, or rather the future which will follow contemporary events in the lives of the prophet and his correspondents. But it had first to be shown very emphatically that God and Christ are entirely in control of that future. This is the object of Chapters 4 and 5. We cannot pause to consider each individual characteristic; moreover none of them gives rise to any major difficulties. The incomparable art with which the inspired prophet has touched in the reliefs and colours of this great fresco rouses our admiration. The majesty of the Creator (4, 1) radiates the whole story with a supernatural glory. Naturally, no description is given of him. Out of respect for his transcendence, his name is not even mentioned. The Apocalypse, so prodigal in its imagery, deliberately avoids any attempt to personify God, leaving his majesty to the imagination. The book suggests this by the symbol of a flame throwing out fiery rays—a suggestion vividly borne out by the scintillation of gems, or

the rainbow, a synthesis of the richest colours. In his efforts to convey an impression of the divine mystery, he chooses the most delicate, iridescent shades.

God from his throne of majesty reigns irresistibly over the whole creation he has made. It is linked with him by the symbols of the twenty-four ancients and the living creatures. Many explanations of these two major symbolismisms have been suggested. To us it seems that the twenty-four ancients in the garments and crowns of victory are intended to represent the march of time—not, perhaps, time in an astronomical sense, so much as a sense of the progress of human history prior to 'these things', that is to say, the period represented by the Old Testament, and the saints whose lives have left imprints on the different stages. The fact that they are garbed in white and have golden crowns signifies that they have been victorious in the great fight for truth and now share the triumph, though not perhaps completely, in the manner that the elect share the throne with the Lamb. For the time being their prayers rank with those of the angels supporting the world, that is to say, the living creatures (4, 9-10; 5, 8-14). In these it is hardly possible to avoid recognising ancient signs of the zodiac, since they call to mind astral evolutions and the immense stretch of time these evolutions take. The angels lead the cosmic paean of praise, and, unlike that of the ancients, their sight already penetrates to the throne itself (4, 6) and they praise God day and night in terms which make it absolutely clear that he is master of time. 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is now, and who is to come' (4, 8) 'for ever and ever' (4, 9)¹. Thus in John's vision it is the whole of creation, space and time, that celebrates the glory of the Creator in praises, led by the

¹Let us seize the opportunity offered by the first of these titles to give an example of the meticulous care with which the Apocalypse is composed. When, at the beginning of the book, he expresses the hope of grace and peace to his correspondents, he uses the elements of the title in the following order: 'He who is, who was and who will be' (1, 4; 1, 8). God was then visualised in the present, so the present comes first. Here, on the contrary, when God is visualised from the point of view of duration in time, the past logically comes before the present or the future, so it runs: 'He who was, and who is, and who is to come.' Finally, at the consummation, when the future has to be made plain, the same title becomes 'O Lord who wast' (11, 17).

angels who preside over the world's evolutions, and taken up by the twenty-four witnesses of earlier human history.

Now it is at the moment when the twenty-four ancients enter into the sequence of human history with their contribution that the cosmic continuity of the vision is suddenly interrupted, and the apotheosis of the Lamb unfolds. (Cap. 5). In order that the praise which history owes to God shall be complete, it is necessary that the Lamb shall intervene. A book appears out of heaven, but it is a scroll, the ancient form of a book, and it has the peculiarity of being written on both sides, so that it can only be read by unrolling the whole. No commentator has ever questioned that this book is the clue to the meaning of human history. By reading it the persecuted Churches will better understand the reasons for their trials, and they will also get an insight into subsequent events. But alas, 'no one, either in heaven nor on earth nor under the earth' can open the book or look into it. The bitter disappointment of John at the inability of anyone to understand, much less control, the march of events, is augmented by the anxiety of the Churches in the face of persecution. But the ancients are not perturbed, no doubt because of the knowledge of the way in which God has led their people throughout the whole of their long history, and because they have learnt to wait with confidence for the coming of him who is at the centre of history. One of them, in whom we are tempted to recognise Jacob (so much is the blessing of choice which he gave to his son Juda recalled here [Gen. 49, 8-12]) reminds John of the lion of the tribe of Juda and informs him that the root of David is successful in opening the book (5, 5; cf. 22, 16). Then the triumphant conquerer of the world and of history, the 'lamb standing' appears in all his resplendent divinity, 'as it were slain' (5, 6). And the same ancients fall down before the Lamb and sing in his praise the new canticle, celebrating his mastery over that history which is to fulfil the glory of the Creator.

Thou art worthy, O Lord

To take the book and to open the seals thereof;

Because thou was slain and hast redeemed us to God

In thy Blood

Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

And thou hast made us to our God

A kingdom and priests

And we shall reign on the earth (5, 9-10).

From this point onwards, the Lamb having now appeared, the song of praise can swell into a canticle of all creation, space and time, throughout the length of history, a canticle which will no longer distinguish between God and the Lamb, for all ages of ages (5, 11-14). Thus we know, at the end of this great vision of Chapters 4 and 5, that it is through Christ triumphant that history renders glory to God, and from now on we are as impatient as the Churches were to hear the message and understand how this triumph of Christ in history will come about and also how those whom he has purchased with his blood for God shall become a kingdom of priests reigning on earth.

Let us run over the major teachings which this great vision gives us on Christ and, completing them by the other Christological visions of the book (particularly 1, 12-20; 14, 14-20; 19, 11-16) pick out the main lines of this Christology in the Apocalypse.

To start with, it is perfectly clear that the prophet of Patmos had no doubt whatsoever of the divinity of Christ. We have already seen that, at the climax of the opening vision (1, 12-20) Christ appears to him with all the attributes of God himself, in the true prophetic and apocalyptic tradition. His pre-existence is already affirmed here. But that is not all. Many essentially divine titles are used for him, besides that of 'Lord' which is used for Christ throughout the New Testament. We have, for instance, Alpha and Omega (1, 8; 21, 6; and 23, 13); the first and last (1, 17; 2, 8; 22, 13); he, living for ever and ever (1, 18; 4, 9; 10, 6, etc.). The throne of God is also interchangeably that of Christ (22, 1-3) etc.; furthermore, there is the same wrath (6, 17). In the final vision which depicts the eternal life of the elect, God can no longer be distinguished from the Lamb: THEY are one; the same homage is offered to THEM; their united name is written on the foreheads of the elect (22, 3-4; compare also 21, 23 and 22, 5). Furthermore, the symbolism of numbers, so dear to our author, gives further testimony

of the divinity of Christ by the repeated use of the figure seven. The word Christ is used seven times (1, 1, 2, 5; 11, 15; 12, 10; 20, 4, 6) of which three are in company with Jesus (1, 1, 2, 5) which is used fourteen times besides (twice seven).

The Apocalypse is primarily concerned with enlarging on the mystery of Christ's divinity, and it anticipates the gospel in giving us an insight into this intra-divine relationship. Especially the relationship existing between the Father and the Son. This is stressed not only by texts where God is specifically named, as in the synoptic gospels and in St Paul, with almost an excess of simplification, the Father of Jesus Christ, (1, 6; 2, 18, 28; 3, 5; 3, 21; 14, 1) but by to some extent new side-lights on the mystery of that paternity. This is one of the most profound lessons of the book, and forms the best introduction, a kind of prologue, to the fourth gospel.

Who, first of all, is the mysterious pregnant woman whom St John sees in the first of the seven visions of heavenly signs, clothed in the sun, with the moon at her feet, and crowned with twelve stars? (12, 1 ff.) No doubt this symbolises the Church, bringing forth her offspring in pain and sorrow (2) and we shall have to return to this point in a later chapter. There is also no doubt that the Church embraces the whole of the Old Testament, that the issue of Jacob, the chosen people, are symbolised by the stars and astral figures which Joseph, the prototype of Jesus, had already seen bending before him (Gen. 37, 9). But the woman right down the ages who gives birth to the elect is also above all the Mother who brings forth the male infant which the Dragon cannot reach, and this is evidently Jesus Christ. Every Christian takes this illustration as a reference to the Virgin Mary, and a traditional interpretation in legitimate continuity with the literal sense has also recognised her as that woman. Jesus, Son of Man, is for all races and for all time the 'terrible fruit' as regards Satan. But I should be willing to think that there is something more in it, and that there is also in this great heavenly vision of the woman a reference to the mystery of the eternal generation of the Son of God. We should not

lose sight of the fact that we are concerned here with the first of the 'signs in heaven'. This Chapter twelve is characterised by the emphasis it lays on locating its visions in heaven before the descent of the Dragon and the commencement of earthly history. As we see in the sequel, for example, the combat between Michael and the Dragon, the starting point of these visions, occurs before the creation of the world, even before the appearance of the Dragon. We are at the very inception of all creation (2, 14; cf. Pro. 8, 22) in the closest possible proximity, in fact, to the eternal mystery of God himself. Now, why not recall here that other great symbol of the woman in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, she who is the wisdom immanent in God before all creation? *Dominus possedit me in initio viarum suarum, antequam quidquam faceret a principio* (Pro. 8:22; cf. Wis. 6, 22; 7, 12; 7, 15 ff.; 7, 25 ff.; 8, 2-3; 9, 10, etc.—Eccl. 1, 4; 15 ff., above all, Chapter 24). Wisdom of God, self-generated; created and creating; the virgin motherhood of Mary; the Church in all ages bringing forth the elect; these are the three mysteries of generation which the Holy Spirit never ceases to show in continuity, the first giving root to the two others in the very reality of God. The same texts could be indiscriminately applied to the three mysteries by the Christian liturgy, and especially that with which we are now concerned. How then can we reject the idea that this opens up a new vista on the intradivine fertility from which issues the male child, whom the Dragon pursues but can never reach?

If this is too agitating a line of thought, and one prefers to limit the symbolism to the temporal birth of Christ, there is another passage of the revelation dealing with the transcendent origin of Jesus which we cannot possibly evade. 'And he had his name written, which no man knoweth but himself' . . . And his name is called the Word of God (19, 12-13). This is the first time St John formulates the doctrine of the Word, the foretaste of that long dissertation of the mystery of the incarnation of the Word of God among men which opens the fourth gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw his

glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father' (Joh. 1, 1-14). This identification of Christ with the living Word of God is not here a matter of secondary importance, as if it had slipped in by accident; it is the key to the whole Christology of the Apocalypse. All the other attributes of the figure of Christ in the book refer back to it—the sword issuing from the mouth, the faithful witness, the white horseman who rides across the world, proceeding from victory to victory. It is as the Word and as truth that Christ proceeds eternally from God, and it is also as the Word and as truth that we watch his triumph in creation and in history. The mystery of Christ is that of truth expressing itself, the former revealing the personal character of the latter, the latter explaining the irresistible character of the former.

We must now take a look at some other aspects of the Apocalypse referring to the mystery of Jesus Christ. They are those concerning the Holy Ghost. Just as instruction on the divine origin of Jesus Christ is given indirectly by means of his manifestation and radiation in the world, equally the action of the Holy Ghost is suggested by the omnipresence of the living spirit which is in God. Thus, on the very first page of the book, we get this formula of the Trinity:

Grace be unto you, and peace
 From him that is and was and that is to come;
 And from the seven spirits which are before his throne
 And from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness . . . (1, 4-5).

It is from the throne of God that the fulness of spirit proceeds—and Jesus Christ in his humanity was only the most decisive divine manifestation of that fulness; and he is named here after the seven spirits which distinguish the Holy Ghost, and, in a way, as the fruit of their perfect mission. For the same reason, when Jesus wishes to give a message for the Churches to the prophet of Patmos, the latter, in his letters, attributes the message both to Jesus himself, who made it known, and to the Holy Ghost who, by these letters, will in his turn make it known to the Churches (2, 7; 2, 11; 2, 17; 2, 29; 3, 6; 3, 13; 3, 22). Thus the whole book is a testimony of Jesus and a prophecy of the Holy Ghost (19, 10). But inversely, when, all at once, in Chapter

five, we are shown the Lamb in his apotheosis, he appears to us having, like his Father, the fulness of spirit, and can therefore also send it into the world (cf. 4, 5). Again, we must turn to the fourth gospel for further enlightenment of the action of Jesus and of the Father by the Holy Ghost (cf. J. 14, 17; 14, 26; 16, 3 ff. etc.). We must recognise the Holy Ghost in that fountain of living water which is shown to us, in the holy Jerusalem, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (22, 1; 22, 17). Is not this a prelude to the passage in the fourth gospel, in which St John expressly identifies the Holy Ghost with the rivers of living water which give grace to the soul? (Joh. 7, 38-39.) As the river flows from the one throne of God and the Lamb we should have here, in addition to a new delineation of the mission of the Holy Ghost by the Son, explicit information on the later dogmatic formula regarding the Holy Ghost proceeding from the Father and the Son (the *Credo* of the Latin Church).

This, then, was how the prophet of Patmos saw the truly divine transcendence of Jesus of Nazareth. Nevertheless, instruction on that transcendence was not the primary object of the message addressed to the Churches at a time when they needed encouragement. He was certainly convinced of the divinity of Jesus Christ, and that conviction expressed itself plainly whenever he spoke, but it was not on this ground that he wished at that particular time to demonstrate the mastery of Jesus since his Resurrection over the progress of human affairs. To the ordinary believer, the resurrected and omnipotent Christ was more easily recognisable in continuity with the historic figure of Christ than in the eternal and transcendent divine Word, and this divine origin was only touched upon to drive home the idea of Christ's omnipotent and invisible action. St John makes the Word his starting point for the fourth gospel; in the Apocalypse, however, he is more concerned with the royalty of Christ and the kingship which he would extend over the nations.

We have already seen how the very first vision, borrowing its illustrations from the prophecies of Daniel, shows the Son of Man reducing the empires of the world to subjection.

Undoubtedly the two characteristic features of priesthood (long garment, 1, 13) and royalty (golden girdle), as given in this vision and in those that follow, belong inseparably to the figure of Christ. Actually, his role of king is much more strongly emphasised than that of priest. In the New Testament, the epistle to the Hebrews is the one which most clearly brings out the sacerdotal qualities of Christ. The Apocalypse is the book of his universal kingship (14, 14; 19, 12) and this regal sway is formidable. When, in the vision of Chapter nineteen, St John gives us what is undoubtedly the most powerful picture of Christ in the whole of the New Testament (19, 11-16), he shows him to us as a king exercising irresistible domination. Even then Christ appears in a priestly vestment sprinkled with blood (19, 13). The mention of the Word likewise reminds us of his divine origin; but when it is desired to use a word which will more simply express the mystery of Jesus, his domination over the world is summed up under the titles 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (19, 16; cf. 17, 14). The meaning of this is sufficiently clear, especially when we turn up the passage of Daniel from which it is borrowed (Dan. 2, 47). Nabuchodonosor himself in all his power had bowed before this King of kings and Lord of lords.

One might wish that Christian artists would more frequently consult the Apocalypse in attempting to visualise Christ—and all believers likewise! This would reduce the number of crude representations of the God-Man scattered about, many of which would no doubt have scandalised the Son of Thunder (Mk 3, 17), that admirable witness of Jesus! John, the disciple whom Jesus loved—the one who more than all others has revealed to us the love of Jesus for all mankind—is also the author who, in the Apocalypse, has given us the most formidable portrait of Christ. Rather like Jahveh in certain passages of the Old Testament, the Christ of the Apocalypse is first and foremost King of kings, conqueror, avenger and judge. We ought to guard against an over-hasty judgement on the terrible Christ of Michelangelo's Last Judgement in the Sistine Chapel as lacking Christian inspiration. Are we ourselves being quite true to the

Christian message when we adopt this critical attitude? For my part, I know of nothing more awe-inspiring than the accumulation of genitives used by the prophet of Patmos to express the overwhelming torrent of avenging justice bringing God's punishments to the impious nations, through Jesus Christ in his role of irresistible judge.

'And he shall rule them with a rod of iron

And he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God the Almighty' (19, 15).

And this is not an isolated note, expressing only one accessory aspect of the message to the Churches. It is quite often in the role of stern ruler dominating the nations that St John shows Jesus Christ, for the comfort of the faithful persecuted by Rome. When the woman is in labour in Chapter twelve, this is precisely how he depicts her male child:

'And she brought forth a man child

Who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron' (12, 5).

There was nothing new about this. St John borrowed very deliberately from psalm two, which clearly prophesied the rising of the nations and their kings against God and his Christ.

Why have the gentiles raged,

And the people devised vain things?

The kings of the earth stood up

And the princes met together

Against the Lord and against the Christ . . .

He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh at them

And the Lord shall deride them

Then he shall speak to them in his anger

And trouble them in his rage

But I am appointed king by him over Sion, his holy mountain

Preaching his commandment.

And the Lord hath said to me 'Thou art my son

This day have I begotten thee

Ask of me, and I will give thee the gentiles for thy inheritance

And the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession.

Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron

And shalt break them in pieces like a potter's vessel' (Ps. 2, 1, ff.).

The comforter whom the Apocalypse presents to the persecuted Churches for their encouragement is exactly like this formidable Son of the psalm. In the last inspired book of

the Christian Canon, the theme of the Messiah's rule over the nations is thus resumed in a really imposing manner by the new religion. For although it belongs more than any other to a style of literature inherited from the Old Testament, the Apocalypse is primarily concerned with human society. The explicit purport of its most characteristic texts and the historic circumstances they illuminate with the light of Christian thought forbid the interpreter to dismiss these references to the domination of Christ over the nations as merely symbolical. The Apocalypse presents the mastery of the resurrected Christ as being actually in operation over the nations whose turbulent activities make up the sum total of human history. All we need say now—and we shall return to this later—is that the nations described as being brought under the dominion of Christ are enemy groups that make war on God and his Christ.

But then the question arises: how can this domination be brought about? Is the last book of the New Testament a flat contradiction of the most positive teachings of our Lord himself and how can this kingship be reconciled with the kingdoms of the earth from which, in his lifetime, he so carefully remained aloof? Is the historian of Christian origins justified in regarding this as a tentative call on the Christians to rebel against Rome?

The answer to this question permits us to go deeper into the mystery of Christ as it is explained by this great book. No, the prophet of Patmos was not untrue to the teachings of Jesus Christ as to the nature of his kingship. He does not incite the Churches to armed rebellion. Since we shall return to this in the chapter on the Church, for the moment we need only prove this by quoting the passage which exhorts Christians to submit patiently to their trials, thus echoing the words of Christ himself to St Peter: 'All that take the sword shall perish with the sword' (Matt. 26, 52).

'He that shall lead into captivity shall go into captivity;
He that shall kill by the sword must be killed by the
sword.

Here is the patience and the faith of the saints' (13, 10).
Neither the sword of war nor political insurrection will

further the victory of Jesus and his people over the nations. History teaches us how often real values are lost amid the ephemeral gains of aggressive intervention, even when it succeeds. The victory of Jesus will be total and irrevocable; so where is the mystery?

The answer falls into two parts. First, we notice that the domination of Christ over the nations is habitually expressed in a context where mention is made of a mysterious, sharp, two-edged sword which issues from his mouth. It appears in the first vision which struck such fear into St John (1, 16); and we get another reference to it in the letter to Pergamos, which was precisely the town in which the idolatrous cult of Rome and Caesar offered most resistance to the invincible royalty of Christ (2, 12; 2, 16). And the great vision of Chapter nineteen defines to perfection the use made of it by the King of kings and Lord of lords.

‘And out of his mouth proceedeth a sharp, two-edged sword

That with it he may strike the nations.

And he shall rule them with a rod of iron’ etc. (19, 15).

What, then, is this sharp-edged sword which Christ wields so terribly in the Apocalypse, and which is not to be confused with the lethal rapier, the arm political force more commonly employs? There is no doubt about the symbolism of this obscure passage. St Paul had already called upon the Ephesians to arm themselves with the sword of the spirit, that is to say, as he immediately explained, the word of God (Eph. 6, 17). The allusion was a classical one. Addressing the nations, for instance, the servant of Isaias says:

Give ear, ye islands

And hearken, ye people from afar;

The Lord hath called me from the womb,

From the bowels of my mother;

He hath been mindful of my name.

And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword;

In the shadow of his hand he hath protected me

And hath made me as a chosen arrow.

In his quiver he hath holden me

And he said to me: ‘Thou art my servant Israel

For in thee I will glory’ (Is. 49, 1-3).

The sharp sword which issues from the mouth of Christ in the Apocalypse, and by means of which he wields his irresistible power over the nations, brings us back to the mystery of his transcendent personality itself, to the mystery of that living Word which is God, and of which the epistle to the Hebrews has already told us it is 'living and effectual and more piercing than any two-edged sword reaching into the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and the marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart' (Heb. 4, 13).

This, then, is the formidable weapon Christ makes use of in securing dominion over human history, the weapon of the Word of God and of truth. 'My kingdom is not of this world', he said before Pilate. 'For this I came into the world; that I should give testimony to the truth.' With the Resurrection, this triumph was accomplished, and the whole of human history is but a further unfolding of it. The testimony which Jesus made with his blood has been succeeded by unquestionable mastery. This is the lesson the Apocalypse makes clear. In stating this we are following the fourth gospel, which says: 'Have confidence. I have overcome the world', and in the first epistle of St John: 'Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world. And this is the victory which overcometh the world: our faith' (1 Joh. 3, 4)—with this difference, nevertheless, that the Apocalypse concerns the personal victory of Christ, 'Word of God,' and 'King of kings, Lord of lords,' but also, in consequence of this first victory, the triumph of the gospel throughout history, which the prophet of Patmos so vividly suggests by the white horseman leaping forth and riding through the world at the breaking of the first seal.

There is another difference. It introduces us to a second essential quality of Christ's dominion over the nations and is linked to some extent with the class of literature to which the whole book belongs. It is that this dominion also appertains to a judge of imprescriptible judgements. In this class of literature, the eschatological evocations show the judgements of God and Christ unfolding irresistibly in human history. One must therefore speak of justice and not only of

truth, although, as we know, these two concepts are coincident in the tradition of prophecy. Conforming to this long tradition, John therefore presents Christ as

‘ . . . faithful and true,

And with justice doth he judge and fight’ (19, 11).

All the properly prophetic part is full of these irrevocable judgements of Christ, including the Last Judgement (of which more later). Of course there are reminders, amid all this rigour, of the mercy which is the essence of the Christian message. The tenderness of Christ towards the Churches and towards faithful Christians (see the endings of the letters), the protection with which he surrounds them and which shelters them from the punishments he will inflict upon offending nations; even the corrections which will fall to their lot, and in which they must see nothing but a further proof of his love (3, 19; 2, 10; 3, 10); the eternal consolations held in reserve for the day when he will lead them to the source of life and illuminate them with his own light in the holy Jerusalem (7, 17; 19, 14; 21, 22; etc.); all these, as we have said, contrast admirably with the manifestations of divine wrath which occupy the larger part of the book. It must be insisted, however, to avoid misunderstanding, that Christ most often appears in the revelation of Patmos as the avenging monarch exercising over hostile nations the prerogatives of Judge traditionally associated with the Messiah. It is not without reason that, from the very first lines, St John shows Christ to the Churches arriving already on the clouds of judgement (cf. Dan. 7, 13; 7, 26), sowing terror among the tribes of the earth when they recognise him (1, 7). For just as the kingship of Christ over the nations is already in progress and we need only wait for its consummation (11, 15; 22, 16, etc.), in the same way his judgement and his wrath are already overtaking us. The final judgement (described in 14, 14-20) can only consummate that which has already mysteriously fulfilled itself in history. And while the messianic psalm and other prophecies of the Old Testament telling us of the triumphs and reprisals of the Son of David only prophesy an intangible future of which nothing is to be experienced at present, the prophecies of Patmos show us

the conquering action of Christ already in progress, through the extension (which we do not always perceive) of his saving truth, and in the afflictions with which God in his wrath punishes the nations. It will be the object of the following chapters to sort out these teachings. Some of the visions of Christ's anger yield nothing to the descriptions of Jahveh's terrifying wrath in the Old Testament.

To sum up, then, this is how Christ appears in the Apocalypse. Clearly the detailed explanation of the texts introducing St John's imaginative delineations will throw penetrating light upon them, to reveal their finer shades, and the following chapters will also offer important suggestions on the way in which the domination of the resurrected Christ finds expression in the pursuit of divine justice and retribution so that truth may be established. Many may find this Christ of the Apocalypse forbiddingly severe, preferring the gentle Saviour whom St John reveals in the discourse after the Last Supper, in the fourth gospel. Personally I do not feel that the two should be set up in opposition. They are actually very much alike, not only in their methods of expression but even more in the deep religious inspiration that runs through both delineations. It is the same adorable figure, human and yet divine, historic yet supernatural, attractive yet awe-inspiring, that St John conjures up, and I am not sure whether the powerful manifestations of the Apocalyptic Christ are not calculated to have a more tonic effect upon the Christian soul than the unfathomable kindness and condescension he shows towards his disciples at the Last Supper or in the feet-washing scene. It is clear, at any rate, that the thought of his book possibly having a depressing effect upon the persecuted Christians to whom it was addressed never entered St John's head. It is true that the face of Christ which gradually emerges from his powerful testimony could at first glance inspire fear by its expression of divine wrath and vengeance. Soon, however, one is struck and then attracted by his absolute and incomparable majesty. Certainly there is silent and indescribable compulsion in his glance—that 'flame of fire' (1, 13; 19, 12, etc.), but obviously this compulsion, whether for individuals or for groups, is

immanent in the very nature of truth. Falsehood and injustice are intolerable to him, and in his presence they receive the punishment they deserve; but, like truth, he reaches with gentleness and irresistible power into the very depths of the soul that believes in him, and will one day become, with him and like him, a son of God. So he radiates, not the cold light so terrifying to malevolent shadows, but the warm love of a living person immediately accessible to his own. He sacrifices himself for all, and offers to all the mercy of truth, even when, as the faithful witness, he defends to the last gasp the rights of divine truth, which is himself, and which is destined in the end to be triumphant for all time.

Such is the mystery of Christ in the Apocalypse. From beginning to end, from Alpha to Omega, it is a mystery of light and truth. Word of God in his eternal pre-existence (19, 13); faithful witness even unto death in his historic existence among us (1, 5; 3, 14; 19, 11); king of the nations, ruling and judging them with an inexorable sword (1, 16; 2, 12; 19, 11) and scoring incessant victories (6, 2) by his truth in this triumphant resurrected life which he leads invisibly here on earth and will lead until the end of time; and finally, in the consummation of all things, in the holy Jerusalem; the candelabra illuminating the elect with the very glory of God (2, 23), the mystery of Christ in the Apocalypse is from one end to the other that of the truth of God made manifest among men, and radiating irresistibly in accordance with the prophecy of Isaias:

‘So shall my word be, which shall go forth from my
mouth.

It shall not return to me void, but it shall do

Whatever I please and shall prosper

In the things for which I sent it’ (Is. 55, 11).

All in all, one scarcely knows what to admire most in this Apocalyptic doctrine of Christ—the courage with which, taking up the traditional theme of the Messiah’s dominion over the nations, it attempts to show Christ realising this promise in the very midst of a most trying period of history—or the integrity with which, having done this, it keeps

strictly to the gospel line in distinguishing between the religious and the political order—or the profound teaching it conveys on the mystery of God-incarnated or, finally, the consolation, the fervid zeal and the fidelity it could not fail to inspire among the Christians persecuted by Domitian, or, for that matter, by impostors of all times.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF HISTORY ACCORDING TO THE APOCALYPSE

It is essential that Judeo-Christian religious tradition should be presented both as doctrine and as history. Man is a spiritual being living in time. His consciousness of truth is conditioned by his experience in a concrete conception of time as duration. The Judeo-Christian tradition takes this into account. It offers him instruction by means of facts which succeed one another through the centuries by a progression which is continuous, and guarantees the authenticity of higher truths which move on the same plane although they may be outside human control. These are justly called the facts of revelation.

It follows that the inner significance of the doctrinal message of that revelation is affected by its historic compass, and inversely, the message itself, by its superior inspiration, throws light on the history of which it forms a part. The believer, having encountered God in history, learns to recognise his hand at work behind important events, just as it is at work in each individual destiny. The only difficulty that arises is that he may err in his interpretation of history from the religious standpoint, and in coming to conclusions as to the divine intention. It is therefore important to discover whether the Apocalypse provides appropriate guidance for this kind of study.

The historic character of the revelation in the Old Testament, and also the religious significance of that history, are too obvious to need stressing. So systematic is its structure that when we attempt to describe it, we can only follow the order of the sacred books themselves, for they are in historic order. We have to begin with the creation of the world and

that of the first man, at the beginning of time, and then follow the chosen people stage by stage on the devious route through their history. Moses himself, when he drew up the code of Laws which would seem only to be concerned with the present, opened with a résumé of the origins of all things, drawing from the facts of that distant history the essential points for his legislation: monotheism, the Sabbath, patriarchal control, and so on.

Because of its rigid religious aspect, as, for example, the alliance with Jahveh, this history is essentially that of a race, a chosen people living in the distant past among other races. The whole of Genesis is thus conceived to mark the progressive steps by which these elect people gradually distinguished and separated themselves from other races. The remainder of the Torah explains to the last detail the Law which characterises, and must characterise, these people in order that the alliance which Jahveh has concluded with them may be maintained. The historic books then describe the wanderings of these people, considered as such, in their secular life, even the great heroes of Israel deriving their glory less from their personal qualities than from the role they played in Jewish nationalism. It is for the race as such that the prophets, at given moments, recall the compulsions of the past, or lift the veil from the future. In order not to interrupt this great current of history, they galvanised the religious and national consciousness of these people living surrounded by other nations. When victories were scored and prosperity reigned, they fervently called on them to exalt Jahveh, the king of the world who had singled them out from the rest of the nations. When, on the other hand, adversity overtook them, and drove them into captivity, the prophets admonished them to repent the sins which had called forth such condign punishment; but they also reassured them with the comforting promise that the future would bring renewed victories over their enemies, victories as mysterious as they were brilliant, for truth itself and the honour of Jahveh demanded this; his cause was so linked with that of his chosen people that their defeat was tantamount to the defeat of God and the triumph of evil (cf. Ps.

115, 1-2). It is necessary here to read the many prophetic oracles, of Isaias and of Jeremias, of Ezechiel and Daniel, of those who are called the Minor Prophets, in order to form some idea of the stimulating pictures of Israel's future triumphs, the glory of Jerusalem, and the punishment of any nations oppressing them, constantly held before the chosen people.

Which brings us to an important observation touching the Jewish conception of history, which differs entirely from the Christian conception which was to develop later. When we analyse the Old Testament to discover how the Jews regarded the progress of history, we find their views were entirely coloured by messianic hopes. The good Israelite implicitly believed that the future would culminate in a Golden Age. Whether under the influence of fervent and otherwise admirable religious aspirations centred on the ultimate and perfect manifestation of Jahveh, as with the prophets and the upholders of the Ancient Law; or under that of an inflamed imagination, as with the licentious authors of the later Apocrypha, the future which Israel counted upon was one in which God would definitely intervene in her favour. A future filled with the splendour of a new order, combining the glory of religion with temporal prosperity by a cosmic regeneration in which messianic and apocalyptic expectations of the justice of God met. Even after all these centuries have rolled by, we can still sense the burning enthusiasm which these prospects opened up by the prophets must have aroused among the masses.

'I beheld therefore in the vision of the night' says Daniel in an oracle from which, as we have already seen, the Apocalypse borrowed freely, 'one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven. And he came even to the Ancient of days: and they presented him before him. And he gave him power and glory and a kingdom; and all peoples, tribes and tongues shall serve him. His power is an everlasting power that shall not be taken away; and his a kingdom that shall not be destroyed' (Dan. 7, 13 ff.).

And again another text in which, after speaking of the empires that will attack the people of God, the prophet foresees the glorious revenge these people take, and the establishment of their universal dominion:

'And that the kingdom and power and the greatness of the kingdom, under the whole heaven, may be given to the people of the saints of the Most High. Whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all kings shall serve him and shall obey him.' (Dan. 7, 27.)

In this future triumph of Israel, as we have said, all messianic and eschatological prospects merged. The coming of the Messiah, son of David, would coincide with the end of the world, the Last Judgement. The last Jewish apocalyptic works before the Christian era expressed all this expectation of divine vengeance, and even those Jews who no longer believed in the political triumph of their people without renouncing for all time the triumph of Jahveh's cause, took refuge in the terrible judgements at the consummation. 'After so much ephemeral success,' writes Father Lagrange, 'they had lost all faith in the world here below, where they were menaced by the irresistible onrush of enemies exerting all the powers of evil. This is the state of mind we recognise in the apocalyptic writings, one which would call into being a new hope, of an Israel that could only rise from the debris of the world, thanks to a Saviour from on high.'¹

Even in the prophets this piling up of messianic prophecies and eschatological prospects is to be found. Witness this passage of Joel, which I have chosen among many because of three things: messianism, eschatology and judgement, here found in conjunction, but also because we shall presently see St Peter using it in preaching the Christian gospel.

And it shall come to pass after this that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh:

And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy:

Your old men shall dream dreams

And your young men shall see visions.

Moreover upon my servants and handmaids

In those days I shall pour forth my spirit.

And I will show wonders in heaven: and on earth,

Blood and fire and vapour and smoke.

The sun shall be turned into darkness

And the moon into blood:

Before the great and dreadful day of the Lord doth come.

And it shall come to pass that everyone that shall call

Upon the name of the Lord shall be saved

¹ M. J. Lagrange. 'Judaism.'

For in Mount Sion and in Jerusalem
 Shall be salvation, as the Lord hath said,
 And in the residue whom the Lord shall call (Joel, 2, 28-32).

Thus, turned towards the future, the souls of religious people were already caught in the enchantment of the holiness the Messiah would radiate as he called this new world into being. How can we help quoting Isaias:

And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse
 And a flower shall rise up out of his root,
 And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him:
 The spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
 The spirit of counsel and of fortitude,
 The spirit of knowledge and of godliness.
 And he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord.
 He shall not judge according to the sight of the eyes,
 Nor approve according to the hearing of the ears.
 But he shall judge the poor with justice
 And shall reprove with equity the meek of the earth . . . etc.
 (Is. 11, 1 ff.).

Here again, in thoughts closely related to those we find in St John, the primarily spiritual character of the Messiah's domination of the nations is very marked.

And in the last days
 The mountain of the house of the Lord
 Shall be prepared on the top of mountains,
 And it shall be exalted above the hills;
 And all nations shall flow unto it.
 And many people shall go and say:
 Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
 And to the house of the God of Jacob;
 And he will teach us his ways
 And we shall walk in his paths.
 For the law shall come forth from Sion;
 And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
 And he shall judge the gentiles,
 And rebuke many people:
 And they shall turn their swords into ploughshares
 And their spears into sickles.
 Nation shall not lift up sword against nation;
 Neither shall they be exercised any more to war.
 Oh, house of Jacob, come ye!
 And let us walk in the light of the Lord (Is. 2, 2 ff.).

Not all the texts have the same admirable spiritual content. Jewish apocalyptic writings, for example, the Jubilees and

the Testaments of the Patriarchs, take more pleasure in describing material pleasures which the Golden Age will bring—length of years and the fabulous fertility of a land flowing with milk and honey, as well as cosmic and astral wonders which mankind will see. It is waste of time to pause over these literary productions, the emphasis and the grandiloquence of which contrasts strikingly with their doctrinal poverty. We only mention them here because their style, like that of all the most beautiful oracles and prophecies, proves that the history of Israel, like its religious aspirations, always lay in the future. This was a progressive conception of history, the progress here being understood in the sense that it finds its fulfilment by the intervention of new developments and the installation in all spheres of a new order of things different from those in which the people then lived, which the Messiah would bring with him, and to whom the soul of Israel turned as its history marched towards him.

‘When the fulness of the time was come,’ writes St Paul to the Galatians, ‘God sent his son, made of a woman, made under the law; that he might redeem them that were under the law’ (Gal. 4,4). Elsewhere he says that it was the design of God in the fulness of time to ‘re-establish all things in Christ, that are in heaven and on earth, in him’ (Eph. 1, 10). Again the same conception of history’s evolution is expressed by St Peter in his first epistle (I Pet. 1, 20), and in the admirable way the epistle to the Hebrews opens: ‘God who, at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophet, last of all, in these days, hath spoken to us by his son . . . ’ (Heb., 1, 1).

For the first generation of Christians, this was the certainty on which they based their ideas of the progress of history. With the birth of Jesus, the ‘end of time’ foretold by the prophets had arrived. We are now in the last age of human history. Jesus himself opened his ministry by emphatically declaring: ‘The time is accomplished and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the Gospel’ (Mk. 1, 15). None of the apostles spoke in any other strain. This, indeed, was an indispensable condition of their adherence to Christ.

In that Jewish environment in which they propagated their message, to recognise Jesus as the Messiah was to proclaim that the last days had arrived.

This is the substance of St Peter's speech to the Jews of Jerusalem after the miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost: 'All were astonished and said to one another: "What meaneth this?" But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spoke to them: "Ye men of Judea and all you that dwell in Jerusalem, be this known to you, and with your ears receive my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day (about 9.0 a.m.). But this is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days (saith the Lord) I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy", etc.—the text of Joel already quoted then follows (Acts, 2, 12 ff.).

From that time onwards, this is the habitual theme of apostolic preaching. The time has come; cease, therefore, your straining towards the future for essential things, the kingdom of God has already been inaugurated, and is only waiting for you to enter and claim its inexhaustible riches.

But, by the same token, history and revelation entered upon a new relationship, and one which was to raise many a problem! Christian revelation, to be sure, rested, like that of the Jews, on sacred history, for it depended entirely on the historical fact of Jesus Christ, apart from whom the necessary access to God could in no way be gained. But whereas Jewish history leant towards the future with all the force of its messianism, Christian history, recognising the Messiah in Jesus, became centred in him, and will forever remain so, having nothing essential to expect of the future. This is fully understood; nevertheless the last day will come, when all creation will reach its destined end in 'the new heaven and the new earth' of the prophets and of the Apocalypse (21, 1). But this will embody only the ultimate extension of a principle, all the essentials of which came into being with the birth of Jesus Christ. For the true Christian, there is no gift of God that can ever take precedence of him whom he gave to the world in Christ. Mankind, therefore, cannot hope for

any principle of salvation more effective than that which was given to them with the New Adam. Here, then, was a Christian eschatology directed towards the 'consummation of time'; there was no longer a Christian messianism. The Messiah had already arrived, bringing with him the ultimate alliance between God and man. It only remains for individuals and nations to enter into this alliance. Men may reject Christianity as the Jews rejected it; nevertheless, this stone remains the only corner-stone possible, 'neither is there salvation in any other' (Acts 4, 11-12). This was, and must always remain, the most positive conviction of Christians.

We shall soon see that this new turn in the significance of history could not fail to involve the religious soul in a number of problems. Let us leave on one side, for later examination, the difficulty of completely reversing the religious sentiment inherited from Israel, by substituting the actual possession of Christ in faith for the messianic expectation of his coming or of his return. This involved the whole problem of the coming, to which we shall return. It was not a matter of what Christians could still expect of the future, since by their faith they recognised the coming of the Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth. That being so, the main question was the interpretation they should place on that future, and, above all, what should be their attitude towards the present. Their messianic hopes being henceforth fulfilled, what became of the triumph of the Messiah which they had expected—his promised domination and that of his people over the whole universe? Certainly Christ himself, after having been humiliated in the Passion, had proceeded to the glory of the Resurrection and the Ascension, which had for the early Christians an importance probably no longer accorded to them by the faithful to-day. The manifestations of the Holy Ghost also added their testimony to the invisible triumph of Jesus. But what other evidence was there? By what signs could one recognise the mastery of Christ over the nations? Or that of his people side by side with him?

Of course there were at first undeniable spiritual victories. They were obvious to everyone in the days following the Ascension and Pentecost, and could not help causing some

sensation. The gospel looked as if it was actually on the way to conquer the world. 'All power is given to me in heaven and in earth,' our Saviour had said after his Resurrection. 'Going therefore, teach ye all nations' (Matt. 28, 18). The programme was as precise as it could be: the teaching would commence with Jerusalem and Judea, then extend to Samaria, and then go on to every corner of the earth (Acts 1, 8). This was the plan as mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, and, profiting from the unity of the Roman Empire, which seemed nothing short of providential, St Paul journeyed from East to West, sowing Churches everywhere; he even got so far as Spain, that is to say, to the outermost limit of the world then known, pursuing his apostolic labours. In his letters he describes the conquering ardour of the first Christians, roused by this rapid propagation of the faith. 'I give thanks to my God, through Jesus Christ, for you all,' he writes, 'because your faith is spoken of in the whole world.' It was spoken of in the Churches, from Jerusalem to Rome, from Corinth in Macedonia, across the whole of Asia Minor, in Alexandria as in Athens; and this visible progress of God's reign, in such a few years, as well as the intensity of the religious life it awakened in so many souls, not in any narrow circle of deep thinkers, but among **people** of all sorts and conditions, seemed sufficient explanation of the delay in the spectacular manifestation of Christ's return, with which he was expected at any moment to crown his work on earth.

And now here was Domitian with his decree, shattering not only the hope of the Church's extension but also the spiritual reign of God which was to be established in this world by the Church. This was no minor disaster, affecting only a few local communities; it struck at the very root of the Christian Church itself. Far from going on, step by step, to culminate in a final sensational victory, the kingship of Christ seemed to have been brought to a halt, its force scattered more and more by the grim realities of life in the material world, to take refuge in men's secret hearts, where this check, in more than one case, raised doubts, and an

